



# Tethering of equines

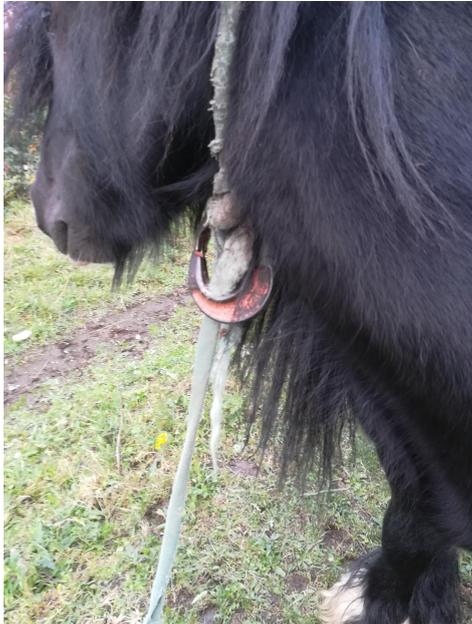
*Ensuring animals have a good life by advocating on their behalf*

## Key facts...

- ★ The RSPCA is opposed to the practice of securing a horse, pony or donkey for grazing on a length of rope or chain (tethering).
- ★ The practice is not illegal, but we have never considered it a viable way of keeping horses, because it potentially compromises the animals' welfare in many ways.
- ★ For the welfare needs of a tethered horse to be met, they would have to be very carefully and regularly monitored, be safely tethered with properly designed and fitted equipment, given constant access to shelter, appropriate feed and water, along with regular and lengthy periods of free-roaming without the tether, but sadly, this rarely happens.
- ★ Our Inspectors are very frequently called to incidents involving inappropriate tethering practices, or to help animals that have become injured on tethers.
- ★ Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 owners have a legal duty of care to meet the welfare needs of their horses at all times.
- ★ The Defra Code of Practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids and the Welsh Government Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses state that tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal.

## What does the law say?

Under section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006<sup>1</sup> owners have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to meet the welfare needs of their equines at all times. Owners could be in breach of the Act by tethering a horse if this means that the animal's welfare needs are not being met.



The Defra Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids<sup>2</sup> states that tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal and the Welsh Government Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses states it should never be used as a long-term measure to control horses<sup>3</sup>.

Although the practice of grazing horses, ponies or donkeys by tethering them with a rope or chain is not illegal, we have never considered it a viable way of keeping horses, because the practice compromises the animal's welfare in many ways.

Picture 1: a horse tethered by old rope and a tow-truck hook. (Credit: M. Kennedy)

## What is the welfare impact on animals?

For the welfare needs of a tethered horse to be met, they would have to be very carefully and regularly monitored, be safely tethered with properly designed and fitted and safe equipment, given constant access to appropriate shelter, appropriate feed and water, along with regular and lengthy periods of free-roaming

<sup>1</sup> [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#)

<sup>2</sup> Defra. [Code of Practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids](#). April 2018

<sup>3</sup> Animal Welfare Network Wales. [Code of Practice for the welfare of horses](#). 2018

For further information or if you have any questions please contact: [politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk](mailto:politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk)

without the tether, but sadly, this rarely happens. Our Inspectors are very frequently called to incidents involving inappropriate tethering practices, or to help animals that have become injured on tethers.

Tethering of horses is one of the most common equine welfare issues RSPCA inspectors deal with. In 2018 the RSPCA received over 4,997 complaints about tethered horses.

Picture 2: a horse tethered to a tree with an eye injury. Note how the tether chain has become entangled with the tree. (Credit: RSPCA)



### What does the RSPCA recommend?

The RSPCA is opposed to the practice of securing a horse, pony or donkey for grazing on a length of rope or chain (tethering). We have never considered it a viable way of keeping horses, because it potentially compromises the animals' welfare in many ways.

We welcome any initiative which raises the profile of the issue. While the introduction of stricter measures such as a maximum time period on the tether may be a way forward, the impact of this and other potential legislation on the ongoing horse crisis of neglected, abandoned and fly-grazed equines is unknown. For example, if tethering were to be banned outright, this could lead to problems elsewhere, such as increased fly-grazing and abandonment. We believe that further thought and consideration is needed to identify the best way forward.

Whether or not a change in the law occurs, the key issue is enforcement of existing animal welfare legislation and it is local authorities who have statutory responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. So we would ask that appropriate resources and training are available so they can properly enforce existing legislation.