



Leone Equestrian Law LLC

My Horse Damaged Property at the Boarding Barn. Am I Responsible for Paying for It?

By Leone Equestrian Law | www.EquestrianCounsel.com

Q. I board my horse at a local stable, and unfortunately, he damaged his stall door overnight. We don't know exactly what happened, but thankfully he wasn't injured. However, the door will need to be replaced. It will probably cost a few hundred dollars, but there is nothing included in my boarding contract about me having to cover any costs from damage from my horse. Am I responsible for paying the cost of replacing it?



If you board your horse at a stable, make sure you carefully review your boarding contract so you are aware if you are responsible for paying for any potential damages he might cause.

A. As many of us know, horses can be accident-prone. Even though we'd like to keep our horses swaddled in bubble wrap for their own safety, that's just not possible. An experienced barn owner or manager can do their best to help prevent accidents from occurring at their facility, but sometimes things happen beyond their control. Following safety protocols and keeping the stable and fences in good working order can go a long way in protecting the horses from potential accidents.

Fortunately, your horse was not injured during his ordeal, but now the main concern is who will cover the replacement costs of the damaged stall door. Since your stable owner did not include any provision in your boarding contract specifying that you as the horse's owner would be responsible for any damage to the facility caused by your horse, you are not legally obliged to pay for the damages. Some boarding contracts do contain provisions like these, though they are more commonly found in self-care boarding agreements where the owner, not the stable, provides care to the horse on the stable's property. In your case, because nothing was included in the contract about this scenario, the stable owner will be responsible for the repair costs.

For many boarding stable owners, repairing damage around the facility is the cost of doing business, and the stable usually pays for all damages when they occur, regardless of the amount. They might even factor in these potential expenses when they set their monthly boarding fee. Also, in some situations (such as a broken fence between two fields), it is not always obvious which horse is the culprit. So, to be fair, the stable owner will often cover the costs to mend the fence and avoid placing the blame on any particular horse in order to keep relations with the boarders harmonious.

However, since your horse obviously was the culprit in the damage to his door, it's worth having a conversation with the stable owner about the situation. You could offer to chip in on the cost of the new door, which they would probably appreciate. You might also try and figure out the cause of the accident, if you can, to avoid any future problems. Maybe your horse is stabled next to another horse he dislikes, and he might need to be moved to a different stall to avoid any bickering.

In any case, being able to refer to your signed boarding contract in a situation like this is always useful. Carefully reviewing everything in your boarding contract, especially before you sign it, will help you be prepared to handle situations like this and can protect you from any unexpected financial obligations.

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Leone Equestrian Law is available to provide equine legal documents and contracts, including co-ownership agreements. Email info@equestriancounsel.com to request assistance with such documents or for any additional questions on this topic including how to handle stalemate situations when it comes to co-ownership and more details on forming an LLC.

Led by Armand Leone, Jr., MD, JD, MBA, Leone Equestrian Law LLC provides legal services and consultation for equestrian professionals ranging from riders and trainers to owners and show managers in the FEI disciplines on a wide variety of issues.

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