



It's Good To See the FEI Investing in Vest and Welfare Research

By Armand Leone

In his [latest column on The Chronicle of The Horse](#), Armand is encouraged to learn of a fresh push to analyze the efficacy of air vests as well as the establishment of a new FEI Equine Welfare Advisory Group looking at the use of horses in elite sport.

As a member of the FEI community, I try to constantly stay abreast of news and developments across the disciplines. The horse world seemed to be abuzz with important discussions at last month's 2025 FEI Sports Forum in Lausanne, Switzerland, especially those concerning safety vests and horse welfare.

I was heartened to hear the debates at the forum. I particularly applaud the news that further investigations will be conducted into the use of safety vests and body protectors, in all their various forms. It's a subject I feel strongly about.

A new working group has been established that "aims to enhance athlete safety by evaluating the effectiveness of equestrian safety vests and body protectors in reducing serious rider injuries and will identify necessary research to recommend optimal testing standards and future vest designs."



*Armand hopes to see body protectors, as worn by Jennifer Alfano at the 2024 Platinum Performance/USHJA International Hunter Derby Championship, be more widely adopted across horse sports, including in the hunter and equitation rings. **Photo by Mollie Bailey***

While more information is always welcome, I think there's already enough evidence to assert that currently available body protectors generally reduce both the chance and severity of injury to the upper torso during a fall. In terms of air vests, we simply don't have the hard data yet to say with certainty that they decrease the chance of injury. Hopefully, the new working group will be able to shed some more light on that, which may lead to new guidance for air jackets.

In the meantime, I believe the U.S. Equestrian Federation (USEF) should facilitate the use of protective vests in competition but not mandate it at this stage. I'm reminded of and encouraged by this passage in the USEF rules that explicitly allows competitors to use vests without being penalized:

"Body Protecting Vest. Any exhibitor may wear protective headgear and/or a protective vest, either body protecting or inflatable, specifically designed for use in equestrian sport in any division or class without penalty from the judge."

This explicitly states that there should be no penalties or bonus points for wearing or not wearing a protective vest in competition. It's worth remembering that this includes hunters and equitation competitors, too.

The other presentation at the Sports Forum, its 14th edition, that piqued my interest focused on a new 37-part Equine Welfare Action Plan to improve horse welfare. The FEI announced the establishment of an FEI Equine Welfare Advisory Group to promote a positive and collaborative approach to the use of horses in elite sport.

[Read the Full Article on Chronicle of the Horse](#)

Dogs and Horses: Who Is Liable?

Dogs and horses go hand in hand. Where there's a barn or horse owner, there's often a dog tagging along. More often than not, horses, dogs, and their people can coexist peacefully and without issue.

That said, there's the occasional problem caused by a dog that may have legal ramifications. For example, your dog may be playing in the barn and accidentally spooks a horse, potentially injuring someone. There's also the scenario in which a loose dog interrupts a horse and rider during competition, causing the rider to go off course or requiring the horse and rider to pull up so that all parties leave the round unharmed. Even if the horse and rider walk out of the ring or off the field in one piece, the dog's interruption may have cost them a top placing and even prize money.



*Having clear guidelines in place protects both barn owners and dog owners from liability. **Photo by Shutterstock***

So, who's responsible in these scenarios, and what can be done in advance to ensure that dogs and horses can continue to coexist harmoniously? It starts with taking the necessary precautions, whether you're a property owner, a manager, or a dog owner.

First, as a barn owner, put up signs stating your rules regarding dogs on the property. Common sense plays a significant role here. Signage stating that dogs must be on a leash puts people on notice that dogs are not allowed to run loose. That's the first step as a barn owner in protecting yourself from liability in the event of an injury. The second step is to enforce those rules. If you hang up signs stating that dogs must be on a leash but then allow dogs to roam the property at will, you're opening the door to issues.

Let's use the example of a dog spooking a horse and the rider falling off and sustaining an injury on your property. If there are stated rules that a dog must be on a leash, and a customer's dog is running loose and causes injury to a rider, then the dog's owner may be liable for the injuries. In this situation, the dog owner's failure to leash the dog was likely the cause of the accident. The leash rule may also protect you from liability. However, if you don't enforce the leash rule, then you may be liable, along with the dog owner, in part, for failing to implement your own rule and protect horses and riders on the property.

[Read the Full Story on Sidelines](#)

For advice and counsel related to the equestrian industry, contact Leone Equestrian Law at info@equestriancounsel.com.

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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