

Safety in equestrian exhibitions

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Abstract

The world of equestrian exhibitions aims most of its attention on the overall image and glamour, without focusing organizational strains on safety among public, workers and horses. Preventing accidents on workplaces means protecting the safeness of people and animals. The not easy definition of risks in the equestrian range rises from the extreme variability and arduous foreseeing of working states and from the considerable number of activities which are often simultaneously performed.

The sphere of these risks concern:

Safety of people:

constraint of dangerous animals, buildings and structures authorized by firemen, sound fences and enclosures around rings, trial and competition fields, safety distance from public and horses, moving carriages and equipments, visible signals of routes equipped for horses.

Safety of workers:

specific training and information for horse managing employees, equipments and individual protective devices according to regulations, good acquaintance of expositive dynamics.

Horses' physical and psychical safety:

sound and wide stalls so that horses may be stabled in the most comfortable conditions; doors, gangways and transit paths free from dangers, obstacles and unevenness that may wound horses; removal of stress from excessive lighting, ceaseless presence of noisy public, scanty moments of relax through daytime, close presence of more stallions, separation of foal from mare.

As conclusion, to reach a real optimization of safety in equestrian exhibitions, fairs and expositions it is necessary to develop a level of attention in the three areas mentioned above so that a good degree of protection can be reached in a global and commensurate way. Only applying some simple but basic rules, it will be possible to grant a complete and effective safety in the framework of every respectable equestrian show.

Keywords: safety, equestrian exhibitions.

Preliminary statement

If analysis and definition of risks involves great difficulties due to the presence of horses in permanent structures, we can easily imagine what happens when, along with all the daily problems, you have to struggle with those added by precarious situations, new places and boosting noises, provoked from an unknown environment in a sport or show event.

In these contexts there are rules for sanitary provisions and location of stalls, but almost nothing in terms of safety of people, workers or horses. Rules in force in these situations points out only the responsibility of the expositors, who must be considered responsible in case of damages to people or objects, but on the other side the organization does not refund any damage, of any kind, that has taken being inside the event.

Even in important international events you can very often see horses being rode among crowds of people, animals without a keeper, safety exits badly indicated and sometimes obstructed and fire disposals absolutely insufficient.

To expose our work giving some indications related to the necessity of applying the safety rules in force on working places in the specific sector of horse events (shows, fairs, competitions, ecc) and horse centres and stalls, horse breeding centres and therapeutic centres for horse rehabilitation, it is necessary to take a look to the law outline in which we have to move about nowadays.

The application of the *Testo Unico sulla Sicurezza*

Issued in April 2008 and operative since May 15th 2008, it includes all the preceding laws related to safety in working places and it is applied without differences in all the private and public activities, prescribing the necessary measures related to wellness and safety of workers in their working places. The Testo Unico founds a total and compulsory application, with the institution of those roles referred to safety that the precedent laws (D.Lgs.626/94 and following modifications) already had created in the so called "chain of safety".

Once the safety roles have been indicated and instituted, with a specific nomination formally accepted by the singles, it is necessary to carry out the duties and the responsibilities provided for each one. The violation or the inobservance of these duties brings on, also for the worker as for the other subjects involved, very heavy administrative sanctions and penalties, related to the importance.

For a correct "evaluation of risks" (not always to be done in a script modality) defined by the formula: risk = probability x importance (magnitudo), law prescribes to identify the fonts of risks, make a valuation of exposure to the risks and only after these paces the employer, by himself or with the help of the responsible of prevention and protection service, put hand to the actions that will reduce or eliminate the identified risks.

That means that risk is not identified by the legislator, but by the employer: relating to the activities, to the working conditions and to the working places. Relating to this, in the risk evaluation document, he defines the map of existing risks, determining the measures suitable to eliminate risks or to reduce them to a minimum acceptable level and then controlling their application.

Projecting safety

At the moment of projecting and installing spaces and structures for events, if safety rules would be held in consideration, following the guide lines indicated below, surely something could be improved, without great difficulties and even without great expenses.

As a general rule, during events it is important to grant:

- a) Safety of people
- b) Safety of workers inside the event
- c) Horses' physical and psychical safety.

Safety of people:

For what concerns safety of people and horses' moving among people (which is surely important being a horse show were everyone wants to appear as much as possible) few basic rules are enough:

- no dangerous animal should be placed near visitors or be rode outside a ring;
- not authorized people must not accede to rings, competition and trial fields;
- it is necessary to maintain a safety distance from public and horses, moving carriages

- and equipments;
- it must be forbidden for people, with fences and by personal control, to stay or walk along routes equipped for horses, which must be well pointed: alternative paths must be lined out and well indicated;
- a contemporary transit of cars, trucks, trailers and horses along the same paths must be forbidden;
- every building where people can enter without restrictions must be controlled and granted by firemen, when the specific fire laws require it, and safety exits must be well identified, not more than 40 meters long and without obstacles and unevenness.

Safety of workers:

For what regards safety of workers, all the indications that have a value “at home” must be respected even in these situations. Besides these, it is necessary that:

- working places, even if temporary and precarious, must grant structures with the same safety conditions of the steady ones;
- dangerous objects or people who can disturb workers must not be present on working places;
- specific training and information must be provided to horse managing employees, above all to those temporary workers who usually have other jobs and so have no experience with horses; it is important that these workers be supported by skilled ones and have only duties that they are able to struggle with;
- specific equipments and individual protective devices, according to regulations, must be provided to all workers;
- workers must have a good acquaintance of expositive dynamics and programmes and have to be able to manage th horses in this context;
- to grant the best working conditions, each worker must not have too many horses to attend (1 worker each 5-6 horses);
- if there are dangerous horses, not broken or difficult to manage, workers must be informed about this and only really skilled workers, who have received a specific training, should manage them.

Horses’ physical and psychical safety:

For horses’ physical and psychical safety, on which so often safety of people depends, it’s necessary that:

- horses be stabled in the most comfortable conditions, in solid and wide stalls, with a thick and soft litter and no lack of water or food;
- doors, gangways and transit paths must be large, broad and preserved free from dangers, obstacles and unevenness that may wound horses and workers;
- stable doors must be wide and have a fast and easy opening lock, for any kind of emergency;
- it is important to remove as much stress as possible deriving from excessive lighting, ceaseless presence of noisy public, scanty moments of relax through daytime;
- a horse show is not the best place to operate separation of foal from mare, which would cause nervousness among all horses;
- the close presence of many stallions might cause competitiveness among horses, raising risk level.

Safety in competitions

Other matter to consider in the world of sports competition, particularly in saddle-horse events or morphology shows, is their location inside the structures who give hospitality, often inadequate or not suitable to receive, for a short and concentrated space of time, a heavy load of people, horses and trucks. Otherwise to what happens in race-courses for flat racing or trotting-races, where structures are projected and realized specifically for that kind of competition and where there are physically separated areas for working people and for the public, the equestrian centres live a normal daily mixture of horses, riders, workers and public. To this mixture you have to add, during competition days, an overwhelming chaos created by the greater human and animal inflow in structures usually unknown to the most.

In these situations, the least to be done is that:

- rings, trial and competition fields must be raised far away from paddocks for mares and foals;
- stallions should be stalled separately from mares;
- horses must not be ridden among the public.

Conclusions

A correct application of the rules contained in the "Testo Unico sulla Sicurezza" imposes a new projectual approach in equestrian competitions, shows and fairs, increasing safety levels without bearing heavily upon costs. Even the improvements in horses' performances are due to animals' balance and calmness, which comes also from a correct training and information given to the workers who should learn to manage horses with the strength of technique rather than with the technique of strength.

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