

Restrictions with Renderers Have Changed Equine Euthanasia & Options for Removal

Euthanasia is one of the very difficult decisions that horse owners are faced with. The Corriente Veterinary Service Team understands the emotions and heartbreak that our clients feel when thinking about the subject, especially during an emergency situation. Many of your horses have been with us for a long time so this process can be difficult for our staff as well. This is why we advise clients to think about their options ahead of time to give them an opportunity to plan. Due to recent changes to the rules in Wisconsin regarding removal of the body, we want to make sure our clients are fully informed of their options should the need arise to make this difficult decision.

Traditionally horses have been euthanized with a large dose of pentobarbital (a controlled drug known as a barbiturate). Pentobarbital, an anesthetic drug, works at the level of the brain, rapidly depressing vital life functions such as heart and lung function. Once euthanized, clients have had several of options for the body: burial, cremation or removal/rendering. Unfortunately there can be rules/logistical issues associated with burial and cremation can be cost prohibitive. Most commonly clients have elected for burial on their property or removal of the body by a rendering company.

Products produced by rendering companies are frequently used in animal feeds. Recently, pentobarbital has been found in low concentrations in pet food and pet food recalls have occurred. Pet food manufacturers have lowered their acceptable thresholds for pentobarbital and as a result many renderers are no longer accepting horses euthanized with pentobarbital.

Our rendering company has informed us that removal/rendering was not available with any form of chemical euthanasia, including barbiturates. Also, Wisconsin law states that the body cannot be left exposed for longer than 24hrs from April-November and 48hrs from December-March.

What does this mean for our patients and customers? Currently owners can consider the following options:

1) Euthanasia with pentobarbital is acceptable if the owner wishes to have their horse privately cremated or buried on their property (see option 2). Midwest Cremation Service charges approximately \$1000-\$1500 for cremation for a group and private cremation respectively. With private cremation some ashes are returned in a wooden urn or a different urn can be selected at a higher charge. With group cremation no ashes are returned. Pick up is an additional charge and can range from \$100-\$400 in our area based on location.

2) Burial on your property is an option. The grave needs to be deep enough that wild animals cannot dig up the remains so a backhoe is required. The grave also cannot be situated on or near a water source. This option may be difficult during the winter when the ground is frozen unless a grave has been previously dug. Rules for burial may differ based on your location and individual county rules. Please check with your local municipality for the regulations in your area. The following site lists WI ordinances and codes and can be helpful:

<http://wilawlibrary.gov/topics/ordinances>

3) Currently, local stock removal services in central Wisconsin would be willing to pick up horses that die of natural causes or are physically euthanized by gunshot. As difficult as this option may be for some clients, gunshot to the forehead is considered a humane form of euthanasia by the American Veterinary Medical Association when performed by someone proficient in the procedure and the handling of weapons.

4) Composting is an acceptable method for disposal of the body, if you have appropriate facilities and composting material – horse manure is great for composting. See the attached website for more information: https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/CarcassDisposal.aspx

Please understand that the options and information have been changing, and that new/different options may be available in the future. Corriente Veterinary Service is working with state and national organizations as to continue to provide the best care to our patients and customers. As new information becomes available we will pass it along.

Please feel free to contact our office at 715-342-1212 if you have any questions.