



What to Do if Your Horse is Stolen

HORSE THEFT AWARENESS

AND PREVENTION

Quick action and persistent legwork are crucial to recovering a stolen horse. The actions you take in the first 24 hours after a horse is stolen can mean the difference between recovery and loss. Longtime persistence can also pay off, as horses have been reunited with their owners even years after the theft.

To improve your chances of recovering a stolen horse, act quickly to report and spread the word about the theft.

**Amelita F. Donald,
Pete G. Gibbs and
Vanessa Mason***

Report the theft

Begin recovery efforts by reporting the theft to the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction in your area. Be sure

to obtain a case number and a copy of the incident report, and keep original copies of all police and/or sheriff reports. You may have to prove that the horse was stolen.

Important papers need to be gathered to help identify the horse and prove ownership:

- Receipt of purchase, bill of sale and/or canceled check; Breed registration papers illustrating brands, marks and scars;
- Brand and other identification certificates;
- Health certificate, Coggins test and veterinarian receipts; and
- At least four good color photographs of the horse, showing brand, marks and scars. Photos should include both sides, front and rear views. These should be updated yearly to include the horse's summer and winter appearance.

Although you may be able to report the crime to more than one agency, only one set of statistics on each crime reported is sent to the National Crime Information Center. Reports to other agencies are supplemental, but consider following up with any agencies whose jurisdictions may overlap.



Start recovery efforts by reporting the theft to the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction in your area.

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Visit livestock auctions and horse sales, and alert officials of the theft.

Several agencies and individuals should be contacted immediately:

- **City police department.** The geographical area covered by city police is limited. Although city police handle many types of crime, insist that a report be filed, even if they can take the information only by phone. Make sure they include a full description of the horse, including brands, marks and scars. Explain such terms as mare, gelding, foal or colt. If the department has a Crime Stoppers program, ask if it will broadcast information about your theft.
- **Sheriff's department.** The sheriff has authority over an entire county, with primary emphasis on unincorporated areas. Some cities and villages in a county may contract with the sheriff for police services. County livestock patrols organized by the sheriff's department also recover straying animals.
- **Texas Livestock Inspection Program.** Texas is one of several states and certain Canadian provinces with livestock inspection programs that include horses. Texas legislation has given investigation and inspection authority to the **Texas and Southwestern**

Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA). TSCRA brand inspectors are the most likely people to spot a missing horse, if it is reported missing and has been identified properly. TSCRA is also the designated contact with the International Livestock Identification Association. So, contact TSCRA immediately.

- **Breed associations.** If the horse is registered, alert the registry that it has been stolen. Associations like to know about issues affecting their membership. Also, an innocent buyer may look for registration information or papers on your missing horse.
- **Equine slaughterhouses on the federal inspection list.** If it is possible to reach an equine slaughterhouse, consider going. If you cannot get there, call and alert the plant manager or foreman. Fax a complete description. Stolen horses can be processed soon after the time of theft.
- **Livestock auctions and horse sales.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture Packers and Stockyards Administration has three regional offices, one of which will have an auction list for your area. If more than one auction is held in

your area daily, try to attend all of them.

At the auctions, be sure to check the parking lot sales. Look in all trailers and holding pens. Sometimes horses show up in the auction yard seconds before the actual sale begins. Unfortunately, fictitious papers can be flashed hurriedly and sometimes no one challenges their authenticity. Professional thieves know how to bypass auctions and work through people who may not know they are buying stolen goods.

- **Race tracks, rodeos and other horse events.** Schedules are available from area equine publications and feed and tack stores.
- **Equine veterinarians.** An innocent buyer may request a pre-purchase examination, realize the new horse needs veterinary attention, or need a health certificate required for shows, events, exhibitions or interstate transport.
- **Equine farriers.**
- **All your neighbors.**

Get the word out

To reach as many people as possible, make fliers describing your horse. Use clear color photographs without you or other family members in the picture. Identify brands, marks, scars, age, height and weight.

Include a contact name and phone number. To protect your family, omit your address, unless it is a box number. Talk to law enforcement about the correct procedure and wording to use if you intend to offer a reward.

Blanket a 500- to 600-mile radius. Many thieves think you won't look past a two-hour drive. Place fliers anywhere people are: post offices, gas stations, and grocery and convenience stores. Always get permission before posting fliers at a business.

Enlist family and friends to help send fliers via mail, fax, E-mail and equine-specific Internet web sites to:

- All equine rendering facilities and slaughterhouses that export for human consumption;
- Livestock sales/auctions;
- Breed registries and state horse groups;
- Equine and large-animal veterinarians;
- Farriers, tack and feed stores and farm supply companies;
- Horse magazines, farm publications and newspapers; and
- Race track managers, track security officers and rodeos.

Enlist the media

The media are a powerful resource. Ask radio and television stations to air a public service announcement with theft and reward information.

Use daily newspapers to raise awareness of area horse thefts. Read the "horse" or "livestock" column in the classified section. A high percentage of the ads are legitimate. However, unscrupulous horse traders also use classified ads to sell or obtain tack, trailers and horses.

Follow up daily

Stay in regular contact with:

- Law-enforcement authorities;
- Equine slaughterhouses and rendering plants; and
- Auctions.

Other tips

If you have other horses that are not permanently identified, consider selecting some method of permanent ID. Consider installing a security system if your property has none. Thieves may be tempted to return to "easy" marks.

If you locate your horse, keep it under surveillance and stay as far away as possible. Never tres-

pass. Call the law enforcement agency assigned to your case and let it handle the recovery.

For more information on horse theft awareness and prevention, get these publications from the Texas Agricultural Extension Service:

L-5084, "Freeze Branding Horses";

L-5210, "15 Steps to Minimize Theft of Horses, Facilities and Equipment"; and

L-5211, "Permanent Identification of Horses."

Contacts



Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association

1301 W. Seventh St.
Fort Worth, TX 76102-2660
(817) 332-7064

Coordinates equine inspection program encompassing Texas and Oklahoma.

USDA Packers and Stockyards Administration-Denver Office

(303) 294-7050
Maintains list of auctions.

Texas State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners

(512) 305-7555

Texas Veterinary Medical Association

(512) 452-4224
Maintains list of veterinarians by county, city or zip code.

Equine slaughterhouses on the federal inspection list

Beltex Corporation

Texas
(817) 624-1136

Cavel International Inc.

Illinois
(815) 756-8051

Central Nebraska Pkg. Inc.

Nebraska
(308) 532-1250

Dallas Crown Packing Co.

Texas
(972) 932-3436



At auctions, check the parking lot sales and look in all trailers and holding pens.

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Longtime persistence can pay off, as horses have been reunited with their owners even years after a theft.

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