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VVMA Position Statement

Horse Tail Docking

Adopted by the VVMA Executive Board June 22, 2011

The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is opposed to the surgical or chemical alteration of the tail of the horse for cosmetic or competitive purposes. This includes the practices of docking, nicking, and blocking the tail of a horse. Tail docking in horses should only be performed when it is a medical necessity and should be performed by a licensed veterinarian to ensure adequate pain management, sterile technique and appropriate aftercare.

Background:

Tail docking is the surgical procedure in which a horse's tail is cut between the vertebrae, resulting in a shortened tail. Tail blocking refers to the procedure where the nervous supply to the tail is injected, or chemically altered, to create a quieter tail in the show ring. Tail nicking involves cutting the horse's tail tendons to create an artificially higher carriage.

There are currently 12 states that regulate tail docking in some form. Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, and Washington prohibit the docking of a horse's tail. Connecticut, Michigan and South Carolina prohibit tail docking of a horse unless it is determined to be medically necessary by a licensed veterinarian. In New Hampshire, permission must be granted by the state veterinarian before a licensed veterinarian may perform a tail docking procedure on a horse. Illinois prohibits the tail docking of a horse unless it is proven to be a benefit to the horse and California prohibits the docking of both horses' and cows' tails except in emergency situations. California law also prohibits the import of docked horses or use of them including for racing or work.

No states currently have laws banning specifically tail blocking, but Washington's statute, which bans any "operation for the purpose of . . . changing the carriage of the tail," most closely approaches a ban on tail nerving. Both the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) and the American Paint Horse Association (APHA) ban surgical tail procedures, as well as any injections that would alter the natural carriage of the horse however.

CVMA (Canada) Position Statement on Tail Alteration of Horses:

<http://canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?ResourceID=752>

AAEP Position Statement on Tail Docking:

http://www.aaep.org/taildocking_position.htm

AQHA Ruling on Tail Blocking:

All horses are subject to drug and tail testing under the provisions of Rule 441 (h) of the AQHA Official Handbook, which states: For the purpose of this rule, normal tail function is defined as "being able to raise the tail to or above the horizontal plane." A horse's inability to raise its tail to or above the horizontal plane in response to a tail test conducted on site by an AQHA-approved veterinarian shall be considered a violation of this rule.

AVMA State Legislative Overview:

http://www.avma.org/advocacy/state/issues/sr_elective_procedures.asp