

# Traveling Legally

Make sure you meet paperwork requirements before shipping horses, whether across oceans or state lines

BY MARIE ROSENTHAL, MS

“People have been importing and exporting horses for years, but in the last decade, there has been an increase in the movement of horses,” says Mike Short, DVM, equine programs manager for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Division of Animal Industry. “The world has gotten a lot smaller.”

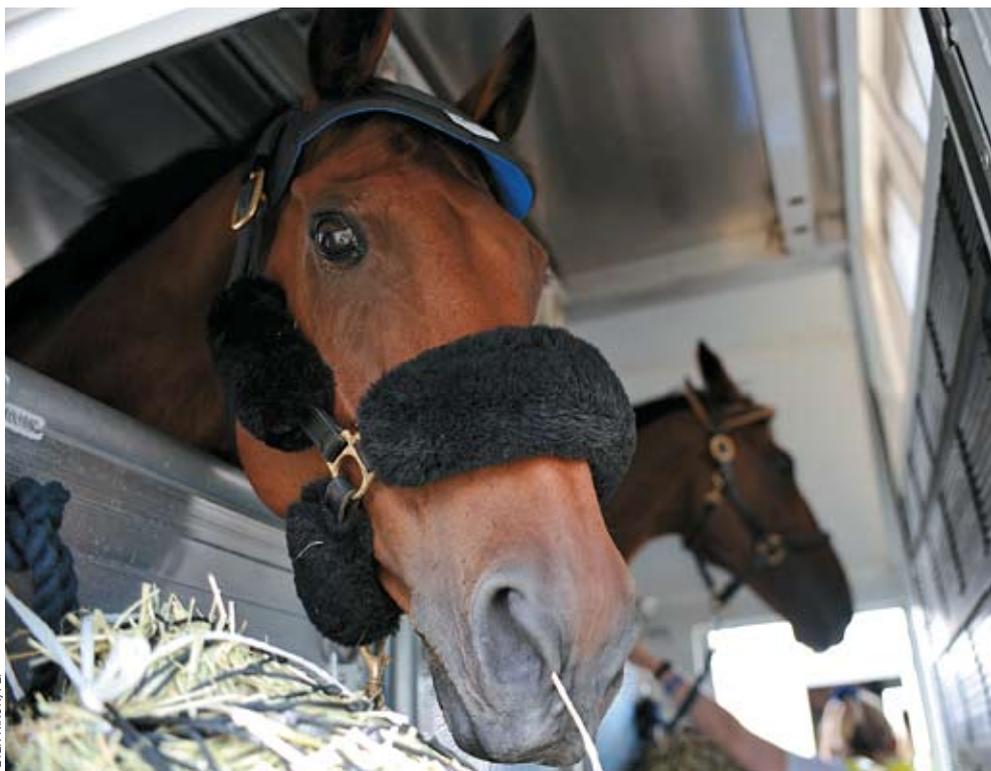
“When I got out of veterinary school in 1998, the value of a horse was about the amount you could win over the lifetime of that horse, but that valuation has changed,” Short adds. “When the economy boomed, people starting bidding up horses. The value of a horse has gone way above what the horse can earn. Now, it’s more like (purchasing) art—I have the money, and I want the best I can buy.”

## International Shipment

Although there are profits to be made, moving a horse to another country is a complex undertaking, experts say, and most recommend that owners and breeders hire a broker or agent rather than try to import or export a horse themselves.

“It is not a requirement to use a broker or shipping agent, but I do think they can expedite the process,” says Ellen Buck, DVM, staff veterinarian with USDA/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)/Veterinary Services Technical Trade Services. “There are a lot of regulations and forms because there are policies set by both countries, then arrangements have to be made for ground transportation once they get to where they are going. The broker or shipping agent has experience with that.”

It is important to do some groundwork and check out the agent or get a recommendation from someone you trust,



There are a number of health requirements to consider before you ship your horses.

suggests Terry Nielsen, vice president of logistics and support at EZ 2 Spot Ranch Equine Isolation Facility in Bigfoot, Texas.

“Work with a reputable agent,” says Nielsen. “There are some out there that do unsavory things. For instance, there is one guy in Europe who gives a quote, but doesn’t tell people in the United States that the quote is in Euros. They think it is dollars, so the bill is 40% more than they expected.”

It would be difficult for most people to do their own importing or exporting, adds Irmgard Geul, owner of Nedpoint Quarter Horses in Pauls Valley, Okla., because most people just don’t have access to the isolation facilities needed to meet

quarantine requirements.

“We are more or less a travel agent with our own quarantine facility,” she says. “People who are buying or selling a horse contact us to move their horse from one country to another.”

For international travel, each country establishes its own requirements, from quarantine times to the health certificates, tests, and vaccinations required for entry. The requirements are intended to prevent the spread of diseases and protect horses, says Rusty Ford, equine programs manager for Kentucky’s Office of the State Veterinarian.

Owners of horses that show in Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) events will hold FEI passports for their horses

that contain the animals' medical histories, vaccination records, and identification information. In many countries, horses have paperwork similar to a human passport that confirms the individual's breed registration, microchip data, vaccination status, and health status/records. While a passport is not required for movement within the United States, several states do participate in a voluntary interstate passport program.

"Every country is different in what they require, and it depends on what diseases are present in the country exporting the horse that we don't want to bring into our country, and vice versa," Buck explains.

### Importing Horses into the United States

There are only a handful of airports in the United States that handle horse importation: Los Angeles, Calif., Miami, Fla., and Newburgh, N.Y. According to the USDA, a horse must have a recent health certificate filled out by a veterinarian and checked by a government veterinary official before export. Besides the general health of the horse, the certificate guarantees that the horse:

- Stayed in the exporting country for 60 days immediately before importation (otherwise it needs a certificate from each country it visited);
- Is free of infectious diseases and does not have any known exposures to infectious diseases;
- Has not received a live, attenuated, or inactivated vaccine for the 14 days preceding the trip;
- Has not visited a facility that had a recent outbreak (within 60 days) of African horse sickness, dourine, glanders, surra, epizootic lymphangitis, ulcerative lymphangitis, equine piroplasmiasis, equine infectious anemia (EIA), contagious equine metritis, vesicular stomatitis, or Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis, nor have these diseases occurred on any adjoining properties during the same time;
- Has not been in a country where contagious equine metritis (CEM) exists, nor has had any contact with horses from such a country for the 12 months preceding exportation; and
- Is free of ectoparasites (parasites living on or in the skin).

When entering the United States, most horses, depending on the country of origin, are quarantined at the port of entry and are tested for dourine, glanders, equine piroplasmiasis, and EIA, according



PETER NIXON/FEI

Horses being imported into the United States must have a recent health certificate filled out by a veterinarian and checked by a government veterinary official before export from the country of departure. Upon arrival, most horses will be quarantined at the port of entry to be tested for disease.

to Buck. All of the samples are taken by USDA officials and sent to its Ames, Iowa, laboratory for tests to be run. "If they are positive, they are refused entry and cannot come into the United States (leave the port-of-entry quarantine)," Buck says.

Most quarantines last 42 hours to seven days. Horses from countries affected with screwworm require a seven-day quarantine. Horses from Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen Arab Republic, and all countries in Africa (except Morocco) typically require a 60-day quarantine so officials can make sure the animals do not have African horse sickness.

"It is the responsibility of the importer to pay for the quarantine and testing," Buck says. "A three-day stay and testing at the import center is going to cost about \$1,300."

The USDA quarantine fees for internationally imported horses—except for those shipped from Canada—increased in October 2009 and won't be reviewed again until Sept. 30, 2010. The daily fee for the

first three days is \$393; then it's \$284 per day for days four through seven, and \$242 per day for days eight until release from quarantine. For Miniature Horses, the fee is \$89 per day regardless of how many days in quarantine, according to the USDA. In addition, owners must pay for the flight, veterinary check, and any requirements set by the exporting country.

**Exporting Horses** "Horses are one of the oldest hobbies for people, and it has survived the economy," says Geul. "If a horse touches your life, you always want to have a horse. A horse is pretty special, but it is also a status symbol, and people want something different. If you live in Saudi Arabia, you want a Quarter Horse. If you live in the United States, you want an Arabian horse. When I lived in Holland, I wanted an American cowboy horse. It's human nature to want something foreign."

The top U.S. trading partners for importing and exporting horses are Canada and Mexico. The U.S. government has special agreements with those countries. Horses

from Canada and Mexico require an official veterinary health certificate reiterating the importing criteria listed above and showing evidence of a negative Coggins test (for EIA) within the 180 days prior to export. Horses from Mexico also require brief quarantines. Most people drive their horses into the United States from Canada and Mexico, experts say, and there are several ports of entry on each side of the border that can process horse documents and permit entry.

Nielsen says the Internet has fostered the increase of international importing and exporting of horses. People find a horse they want online, then they contact brokers and agents to buy and ship the horse to them.

Before a horse can leave the United States, most countries require that it stay in quarantine for at least 30 days. Some countries require a longer quarantine, and some don't require any.

The requirements on entry to another country run the gamut from lenient to strict. Receiving countries usually require documentation of a negative

Coggins test and a recently issued veterinary health certificate. Some also require test results showing that the horse doesn't have equine herpesvirus or other diseases. Recently, because of an outbreak of

## TOP 5 EXPORT DESTINATIONS

In 2008 the United States exported 24,399 horses to the following countries:

- 17,071 to Canada
- 3,555 to Mexico
- 1,905 to The Netherlands
- 1,092 to Germany
- 776 to Argentina

—USDA information

vesicular stomatitis in New Mexico and Texas, the European Union began requiring a negative test for this illness, explains Geul. Many also want the horse to be up-to-date on his vaccinations.

The U.S. quarantine before international exportation is a total isolation unit. Horses of the same health status that start

quarantine at the same time and are to be shipped together to the same country can be in contact with each other during the isolation period, but "outside" horses that are not part of that scheduled shipment cannot come within 30 feet of the horses in isolation.

"We are inspected every time we start an isolation group," Nielsen explains. "Every time we get ready to start a shipment, the ag department sends an inspector to inspect the facility and make sure each group has its own tools, muck fork, feeders ... even hay has to be stored with that group of horses for the period they are with us."

Just as for imports, only a handful of airports can manage equine exportation: Los Angeles; Houston, Texas; Miami; Newburgh; and Chicago, Ill. These airports have USDA facilities that check horses' documentation before they are shipped. In addition, horses require a five-hour rest period before they can get on an airplane.

"There are multiple levels of checks," explains Buck. "Basically, the vet examines the horse and fills out the health certificate, just as for interstate movement, which a

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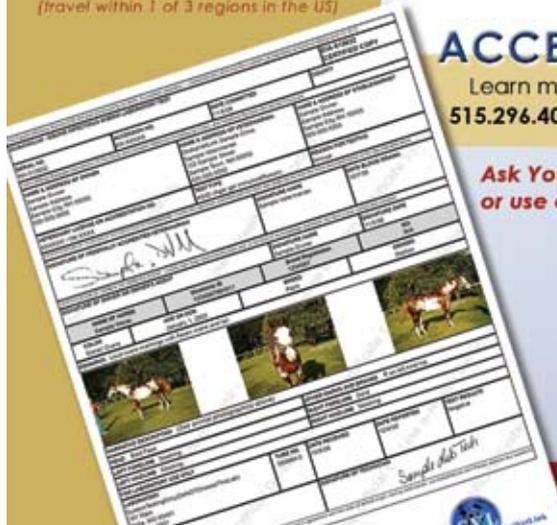
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lot of owners have experience with. Then a government official in the foreign country endorses that certificate. We use the same process here when we are sending horses out of the country. There is also a physical examination to check for any diseases. Mostly, we are looking to see if the horse appears healthy, that its temperature is normal, and its appetite is good.”

To ship a horse to Europe from the United States costs between \$4,000 and \$5,000, depending on the weight of the horse, where it is going, and what tests are required. This includes the quarantine time.

Horses are pretty good travelers, the experts say, and few require sedation for the flight. “Most horses are better fliers than most people are,” Nielsen says. “The containers are in three stalls side by side, so they just think they are in a big aluminum trailer getting down the road.”

The most important factor in importing or exporting a horse is the health of the horse, Geul says. “It is always important to have a healthy horse in good condition. It is a long trip—it can be 24 hours altogether getting to the airport, getting loaded onto the container, the flight, and getting off over there. They are on their legs for 24 hours. You need to buy a healthy horse. A horse goes to so many different environments in a short period of days; make sure they are vaccinated.”

Check with the quarantine station before giving any vaccinations, however. Some vaccines can confound test results. It is a good idea to allow the isolation facility staff to give any required vaccines, so the veterinarian who oversees the shipment can certify which vaccines were given, including serial numbers and expiration dates.

## Crossing State Lines

Many more owners in this country ship horses across state lines than import or export horses. The biggest mistake people make when they take their horses across state lines is not knowing what documents and tests the new state and destination venue require.

“The requirements for entry vary from state to state,” says Short. In addition, venues often have their own requirements. “We can say, ‘You need a health certificate within the last 30 days,’ but the show venue may want a health certificate within 14 days, or they may want proof that your horse’s shots are up to date.”



PAM MACKENZIE

If you’re hauling across state lines in the United States, be sure to know what documents are needed for the destination venue before leaving. Upon entering a new state horse owners should be prepared for state officials to examine the horses’ paperwork and give each horse a once-over.



PAULA DA SILVA

Check the destination state’s temporary requirements for health inspections before leaving. Offices of the state veterinarian generally post these online.

Tens of thousands of horses cross state lines every day. To give you some idea of the number, Florida alone counts almost 100,000 movements in and out of its borders each year. “We count the horses as they move through interdiction sites,” Short explains. “So, if I live in Florida and take my horse to a show in Georgia and

come back, that’s two movements.”

Most states require a veterinary health certificate that has been issued within the past 30 days and a negative Coggins test. Some states also require a (normal) recent temperature reading, a brand inspection, or permit number.

The health certificate usually is good for 30 days, although some states have an agreement among themselves and will accept a health certificate from reciprocal states for up to six months, Short says. That means an owner doesn’t need to contact a veterinarian every 30 days for a new health certificate. The owner should have his or her veterinarian pull blood for a Coggins test annually.

In addition, officials in each state monitor disease outbreaks across the country and might add a temporary requirement as a result of an infectious disease outbreak, even if it did not occur in their state, adds Ford.

For instance, when *The Horse* was interviewing for this story, many states were requiring a negative test for vesicular stomatitis for any horse coming from the New Mexico area.

“The general requirements fluctuate, depending on the conditions we are monitoring throughout the country,” Ford

says. "When we see instances of disease outbreaks, we will communicate quickly with that state and the vets in our state, as well as with the management of equine facilities in our state, so that everyone that might be impacted knows about it."

Consider checking out the state veterinarian's Web site for temporary requirements before starting out.

Although most states generally don't require specific vaccinations upon entry, it is a good idea to ensure your horse is up-to-date on his vaccinations, says Short, and not just for diseases in your home state.

"I would make sure that you understand what vaccines are recommended for the area you want to travel to," says Short. "We don't have state vaccine requirements for horses to come into Florida, but a lot of folks from up North only give encephalitis vaccines once a year, but most veterinarians in Florida recommend Eastern equine encephalitis and West Nile virus vaccines twice a year. We have Eastern equine encephalitis cases every year, and most of those horses die."

Although these requirements might seem like bureaucratic paperwork designed to grab a couple of bucks out of your back pocket, the requirements are important, Ford emphasizes, because they protect your horse as well as others' horses.

"The requirements for moving horses across state lines are to help maintain the health status of the horses in the location that you are going," he explains.

Regardless of the variety of health

requirements, owners transporting horses must check in with state officials when they enter a new state. State inspectors will then review the paperwork and give the horse a quick once-over, looking for obvious signs of disease, like nasal discharge. If the paperwork is not up to date, the horse cannot leave the area and enter the state.

**“The transporter of the horse was in violation of the entry requirements, so an investigation was conducted and an administrative fine was issued and paid.”**

DR. TASHA FORD

Some states allow owners to have a local veterinarian conduct a health exam, issue a certificate, or take samples for disease testing, but these procedures likely will be more expensive than if the work had been done at home. In addition, there might be fines for not being up to date, Ford notes.

"We have had horses come onto the Kentucky Horse Park that had not been tested for EIA," Ford says. "Our inspectors identify that they did not meet the requirements, so they were not able to go to the stabling area. They were put into quarantine. The tests and the examination were done while the horse was in quarantine. Once we got

the results, the horse was released, and it was able to go and compete. That resolved the medical or veterinary concern.

"The transporter of the horse was in violation of the entry requirements, so an investigation was conducted and an administrative fine was issued and paid," Ford says.

Not understanding exact requirements is another common misstep. "Make sure you contact the place you are going and find out what is meant by statements like 'shots should be up to date' ... well, what time frame is 'up to date' and what shots are they talking about?" Short advises.

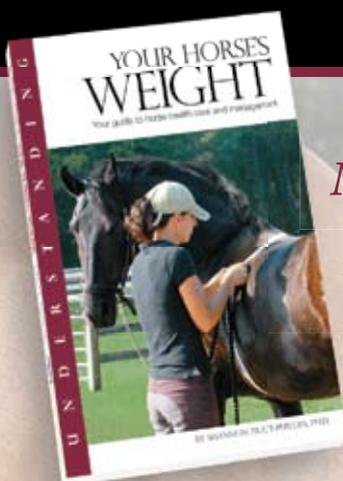
Most mistakes are made because people are rushing to get to a particular venue, and they don't take the time to make sure the paperwork is up to date, Ford explains. "It's like planning any trip; the more preparation you make, the better."

### Take-Home Message

Whether transporting a horse across an ocean or across state lines, there are legal requirements that you need to meet. Your paperwork must be complete or you face the possibility of fines, quarantine, or even your horse being rejected and refused entry into a state or country. Talk to your veterinarian well in advance of a trip or planned import or export of a horse to get advice on arriving safely and legally. 🐾

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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