COMMUNITY NOTE:
Fireworks & Horse Safety

A message from your local horse owners to our neighbors courtesy of the Pennsylvania Equine Council

Fireworks may be fun for people—but for horses, they can be dangerous, confusing, and even deadly. Horses are prey animals whose survival instinct is to flee from perceived danger.

Understanding the Horse Mind

Fight-or-Flight Instinct: Loud noises and bright flashes trigger panic. Horses may bolt, jump fences, or injure themselves and others.

Line of Vision: Horses can see nearly 350 degrees, making fireworks highly visible and alarming even at distance.

Herd Behavior: One frightened horse can trigger a group panic, increasing risk of injury and escape.

Why Fireworks Near Animals Are Dangerous

Even legal or small fireworks can cause serious consequences including broken fences, severe injuries, loose animals on roadways, and danger to handlers.

Why Moving Horses Is Not Feasible

Moving horses is stressful, logistically difficult, and sometimes dangerous. Many facilities house multiple animals including young, elderly, or injured horses. Relocation is not a practical solution.

Training Limitations

While desensitization training can help, it is not foolproof. Young, new, elderly, or previously traumatized horses may still panic unpredictably.

Fireworks Injuries Data

In 2024, approximately 14,700 people were injured and 11 deaths were reported due to fireworks. Injuries often involve burns and damage to hands, face, and eyes. Bystanders are frequently affected. At least 49 equine deaths were related to fireworks and thousands of injuries to horses and humans.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, fireworks can frighten animals and cause panic behaviors such as bolting, escape, and injury—even in otherwise calm or well-trained animals.

Pennsylvania Fireworks Law Summary

- Must be at least 150 feet from structures or vehicles
- Cannot be used under the influence
- Cannot be directed toward buildings or vehicles
- Must not be within 150 feet of animal housing
- Advance notice is required if used within 150–300 feet of livestock

Why 150 Feet Is Not Enough

Sound travels far beyond 150 feet, and visual flashes are seen from long distances. Safe distances for sensitive animals like horses are significantly greater.

How You Can Help

- Attend public displays instead of using backyard fireworks
- Avoid setting off fireworks near farms or barns
- Notify neighbors in advance
- Consider quieter celebration alternatives

Your awareness and consideration can prevent injury, panic, and tragedy for both animals and people.

Thank you for being a respectful neighbor.

Pennsylvania Equine Council