

EQUINE RESCUE TRAINING

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GREAT LAKES FRIESIAN HORSE ASSOCIATION

As horse owners, we invest time and energy to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our animals. We seek input from medical professionals, we review the literature, and we initiate discussions on social media with our peers. We often worry about observed changes in our horse's behavior and question ourselves about our management techniques relating to feeding and colic, how we fence and confine our herd, how do we select breeding stallions with the goal of preventing genetic disorders, and how we best prevent training-related injuries. We as owners do our level best to prepare for and prevent mishaps and medical emergencies.

To broaden our equine safety knowledge, the Great Lakes Friesian Horse Association and Eligius Equestrian Center co-sponsored hands-on training for emergency rescue procedures. We would like to share our experience and the tips we learned with FHANA members to increase your awareness, to help others develop an emergency intervention plan, and to ultimately protect owners, the horses we love, and the public at large.

Dr. Howard Ketover, veterinarian and partner at Irongate Equine Clinic and President of Wisconsin Large Animal Emergency Response (WLAER), and John Palmer, a Captain with Mazomanie Fire Department and Director at WLAER, provided the training. Early on in his veterinarian practice, Dr. Ketover had encountered emergency rescue situations for which his traditional veterinary education had not prepared him. These situations served as the catalyst for Dr. Ketover to pursue training in large animal rescue, and go on to establish WLAER as a non-profit. This invaluable training emphasizes a partnership between horse owners, veterinarians, and first responders to best manage emergency incidents involving horses. Some examples of these rescue situations include horse trailer accidents, a down or cast horse, or horses that have escaped from their pasture. We are fortunate to have WLAER provide this type of training in Wisconsin - it is offered as part of the curriculum at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine for veterinary students, and at local fire departments and police stations for community first responders.



To prepare for general medical emergencies, many of us have first aid kits for both our horses and humans. There are also a number of other items that are essential for emergency rescues that you should secure for your barn and/or truck and trailer. In your emergency kit you should have a roll of three inch caution tape (1,000 feet) to create a temporary containment area for a roaming horse; a hook to move a horse's extremities or manipulate a strap under a horse (e.g. cane, "J" shaped hook); two 4" towing straps, approx. 15-30 feet in length; and a 20 foot lead line that can be fashioned into an emergency halter. If you live or work with horses in winter conditions, non-clumping kitty litter can be used to improve footing for a horse that is down on ice. A useful, but not always practical, piece of equipment is a horse-size rescue glide made out of HDPE plastic. A cheaper alternative is a 4' X 8' sheet of ½ -



¾-inch plywood with clevis hangers to which you can attach towing lines. This piece of equipment will allow the movement of a down horse without excessively stressing or pulling on the animal.

Here are just a few of many key rescue principles that will maximize safety and protect all involved:

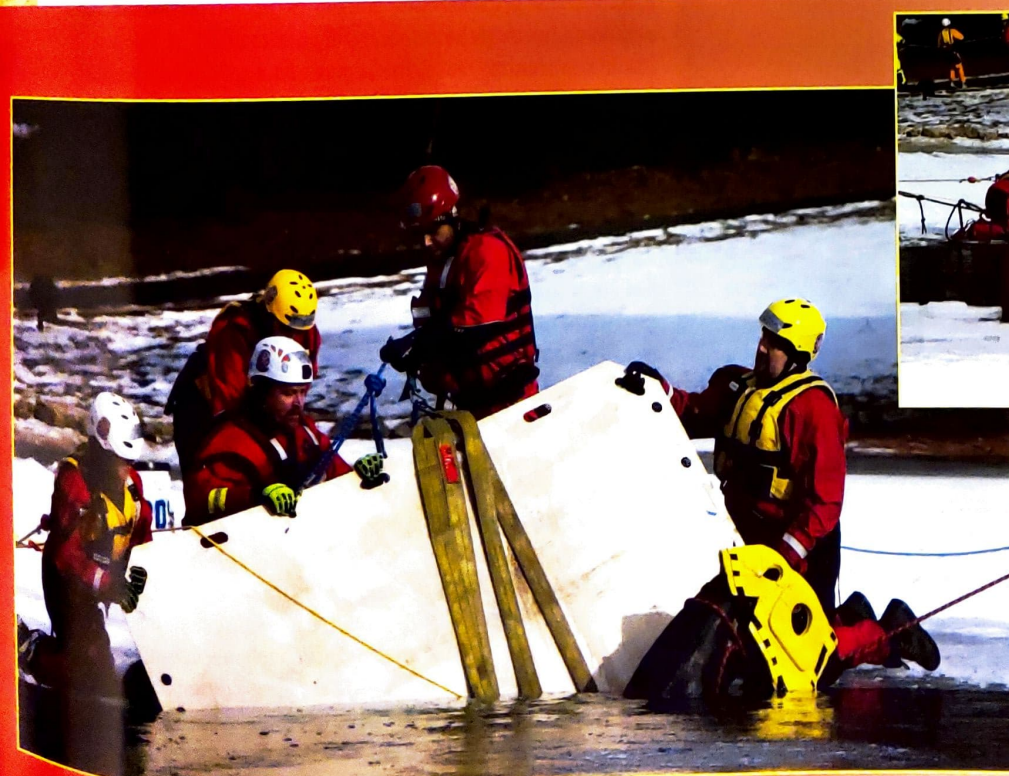
First and foremost, always wear a helmet when engaging in equine rescues. You cannot help your horse if you are unconscious.

Next, if you encounter a down or trapped horse, do not approach the animal without informing or calling someone else; if you get trapped or injured and have not told anyone what you are doing, no one will come to help you. Given the danger of rescue, it should not be performed alone.

Third, do not attempt the technical rescue without the appropriate training and support of your veterinarian and/or first responders. Using appropriate safety techniques will ensure that the horse will not be further injured by incorrect rescue procedures, and will prevent injuries to those assisting. In assembling your team, select a team leader who will direct activities in a proactive and strategic manner.

Fourth, take your time. In the majority of rescues, there is time to develop a thoughtful, well-choreographed team response to protect all involved, including the public. Slowing down to consider the options, risks and establish a plan will often make the response quicker and more likely to succeed.

Finally, remember, containment of the horse is a high priority; never allow an animal to become a greater risk to itself or the public by escaping the immediate area or facility.



Illustrations: Rescue techniques, and the equipment for large animals, are shown at the recent training session. Ice rescue photographs are courtesy of Howard Ketover DVM. Types of rescue equipment photos are for examples, courtesy of Howard Ketover DVM.

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Now, here are some tips for two common emergencies you'll see:

For a down, or cast horse, know the safety zones for human responder positioning to prevent injury – position yourself near the withers, stay away from the horse's extremities and hindquarters. Consider escape routes for the rescuers and the horse, and always be prepared to quickly move out of harm's way. Gain control of the horse with a commercial halter, or make an emergency halter from rope or webbing. Position straps around the horse's body; do not put straps or ropes around the extremities. The straps may be placed around the torso in front of the hind limbs and in the girth area. Using the straps, the horse can be pulled away from a barrier or rolled to assist them to stand up. A rescue glide can be used if the horse cannot stand and needs to be relocated from the area. Do not pull on the horse's tail or head for repositioning; you can seriously injure the horse's spinal cord.

For trailer accidents, quickly call first responders for assistance. Inform the 911 Operator that animals are involved and the use of sirens near the accident may cause the animals to flee or become dangerous. Please remember to attend to all the humans involved first, and then attend to the horses. Do not enter the trailer and do not open the trailer doors. This is important to prevent further injuries to horse(s) or humans, and to prevent the possible escape of loose animals. The rescue team, in concert with the horse owners, should develop a plan to remove the horses from the trailer without entering the trailer. Before you start, secure the area outside of the trailer with a temporary containment to preserve public safety.

We encourage all horse owners to learn more about equine emergency technical rescues for your safety and the safety of your horses. It is highly recommended to share your knowledge and work with your community first responders prior to an incident occurring. Beginning the process of community resource team building well in advance should lead to a positive outcome for you and your horse should an emergency arise. Please check out the [WLAER website for more information](http://www.wlaer.org) and training opportunities.

