

## Horse Theft Information

You arrive to take your horse out for the day, but something is terribly wrong. The lock on the front gate has been cut off and is lying in the dirt in front of the opening. Fresh tire tracks leading away from the scene prove that this was no escape. Do you know what to do or who to call?

Each year, about 75,000 Horses are stolen by bands of thieves who often work in one area or state. When authorities noticed a sharp rise in horse thefts and start to close in, the thief's then move into another area. It's quick, profitable and dirty work, but most Horse thieves swiftly unload their stolen Horses at auctions within the first day or two. And as most Horse owners no, some Horses sold at auctions might end up in the loving care of a new Horse owner, but most go to slaughter.

Experts say the actions you take in the first 24 to 48 hours are crucial if you hope to recover a stolen animal. To increase your chances of recovering your Horse, you must act quickly and effectively. The more quickly you act after your Horse is discovered missing, the better your chances are of recovering it.

### Steps to Take

**Act swiftly.** When you find your Horse is missing, don't let a nanosecond go by. In a missing livestock incident, the more time that goes by after the first 24 hours, the less likely your chances are of ever seeing that animal again. Usually when Horses or stolen, the owners are so shocked that they don't know what hit them. By the time they get moving, it's too late. Part of knowing how quickly to move is knowing what to do beforehand. You should have documents, photographs and contact numbers up-to-date and readily available, but even if you don't, you can still launch an effective search.

**Escaped, Stolen or Mixed up?** When your Horse is not where it should be, first check for signs of theft or escape. Evidence of theft includes forced entry, fresh tire tracks, cut or broken fencing, missing halters or tack, open barn doors or gates, illuminated lights, missing trailers, or anything unusual in the barn or on the grounds.

If your Horse has escaped on its own, you may see bite, scrape or kick marks on its stall door, or spilled feed or grain if the Horse helped itself to your feed storage on its way out. In the pasture, inspect fencing for signs of a Horse climbing out, knocking something over to get through or strands of mane caught on the fence. If you have tufts of mane hanging off a fence, it's usually because a Horse has forced himself on his own through this space. If someone is stealing a Horse, he's not going to pick the hardest place to get through.

Because Horses usually tend to follow one another, other Horses from the same pasture outside the fence or hanging around the opening may indicate the missing Horse left on its own.

Make sure there isn't any logical reason for the Horse to be missing. Perhaps a barn worker, family member or friend moved the Horse to another place on the property or is out riding it. Perhaps an emergency prompted someone to haul the Horse to the vet. In the case of a large breeding farm, check that there wasn't some mix up on the time the mare was to be picked up and taken away for breeding.

**Try to work with the law.** If your Horse may have been stolen, report the theft immediately to local authorities such as the city police or the sheriff's department. Ask them to come out and look at the crime scene, take photographs and open an investigation. Unfortunately, Horse theft is not a high priority item, so authorities might not come out right away, or at all, particularly if your Horse has no identifying marks. Regardless, insist that authorities take a case report, even if only over the phone, including a description of your Horse, noting any brands, freeze marks, scars or other markings. You may need the report later for insurance purposes, court cases, or to document to other agencies that a theft transpired.

While waiting for authorities to arrive, try to put together a timeframe for the crime. Determine the last time you or others saw your Horse. Ask barn workers, family members, neighbors and others who might have been around if they saw any suspicious vehicles in the vicinity, somebody stopping to pet or feed grass to the Horse, or if the dogs made any unusual commotion that someone is trespassing. If so, try to pinpoint the time of the occurrence. Report your findings to the authorities.

Also, get out your bill of sale, veterinary records, breed registration papers, and other documentation and color photographs that will help identify your Horse. You have to be prepared so a non-Horse person or an individual who has never laid eyes on your Horse can identify it. If you have a plain brown mare, for example, pay particular attention to providing a complete description of her including scars, and odd marking, and odd hair swirls, any tattoos or brands, or microchips. Hoof scars or cracks and chips.

**Distributing Flyers.** After contacting the law, create flyers that contain a clear photo and the description of your Horse " breed, color, distinguishing marks, age, size, weight, along with phone numbers where you or others can be reached day or night if anyone has seen or has information about your missing Horse.

E-mail, fax or hand-deliver your flyers to slaughterhouses, rendering facilities, livestock sales and auctions, racetrack and rodeo managers and middleman Horse traders within a

500 to 600 mile radius. Also notify or send flyers to the state department of agriculture (Division of Animal Services), the state veterinarian, state cattlemen's association, breed association, state horse council, equine veterinarians, neighbors, and local farm or area equine newsletters. Some of those folks may be able to assist with rescue and recovery. Post flyers at your local feed stores and tack shops as well.

**Visit local livestock auctions.** Compile a list of local auction houses, especially the ones that meat buyers attend. It is important to include private sale barns, but generally meat buyers aren't there and the Horses aren't in danger of being sold for slaughter right out from under your nose in the first 24 hours.

Find out where the auctions are held and go looking there yourself or send someone who knows the Horse. Check the parking lot for private sales. Look in all trailers and holding pens. "Hot" horses show up in auction yards seconds before the auction sale begins.

**Call Slaughterhouses.** Check in daily with the foreman and ask if there is a horse matching your Horses description. The slaughter facility is more apt to look for an animal that carries identification, there's no way you can prove that any horse is your Horse. On the other hand, if the Horse is micro-chipped or has a brand or tattoo, you can call the slaughterhouse every day and request that they scan or inspect any Horse that fits your Horses description.

**Advertise.** Place ads in local and regional equine papers and newspapers. Sometimes leads turn up.

**Locating your Horse.** If you find your Horse, keep it under constant surveillance without being obvious or conspicuous. Don't try to reclaim the Horse by yourself, as this could be dangerous. Summon Law enforcement authorities right away and let them take care of the recovery.

Nothing is worse than not knowing what happened to your Horse. If you suspect your Horse has been stolen, enlist the help of friends and family immediately. The more you do as soon as you find out, the better your chances are of recovering your Horse.

### **Preparation and Prevention**

Being prepared for a theft and taking steps to minimize it and maximize recovery will go a long way toward protecting your Horse and getting it back. Employ the following precautions:

1. Permanently identify your Horse with a tattoo, brand, or microchip. This proves ownership, aids in a Horse's recovery and if visible, discourages thieves. Keep a record of Horses bearing their freeze marks. Take color photos of your Horse, including head and full body shots (from both sides). Get photos with summer and winter coats, noting any distinguishing marks. If the animal has just one little piece of white on his coronet band, make sure the photo is large enough to see it. Choose 5 x 7 inch photos with the Horse filling up about 75% of the photo.

2. Keep photos, bills of sale, veterinary records, breed registration papers, and other documents together in an easily accessible notebook or folder.

3. Know what livestock auctions operate within a 500 to 600 mile radius of your area, their addresses, their phone and fax numbers, e-mails and when they hold sales. You can usually find the information through the State Department of Agriculture or through the state veterinarians office. Go on the Internet and search for this information. The Internet can provide you with 24/7 information on livestock events and facilities in your region.

4. Remove halters from pastured Horses. It is recommended that you don't leave them hanging near stall doors, but this is a choice to make. Many Horse owners prefer leaving halters by the Horses stall in case of an emergency and argue that most Horse thieves come prepared with ropes and halters anyways.

5. Check your Horses regularly, but deviate the routine. Professional thieves will watch your place before they go to your property, so vary your schedule. Day and night.

6. Install lighting with photo sensors or motion detectors around the barn or property gate, or streetlights by pastures and along the roads. With today's advancements with cameras and Internet surveillance devices, plus GPs and other home security items. It is much easier to provide security for your Horses !

7. If possible, replace wire fencing with board fencing. Wire fencing is easily cut. With board fencing, thieves have to find a gate. Plus board fencing is much easier to spot an open spot or see that the fence has been compromised!

8. Keep wire fencing in good repair and as sturdy as possible.

9. Use good gates, heavy chains and padlocks.

10. Use thoughtful landscaping. Plant trees and shrubs between the pasture and road to block visibility of the Horses from the road, but keep bushes trimmed or absent around gates and barn doors.

11. Post no trespassing or warning signs. **"EVERYWHERE"!!**

12. Consider an alarm system. Keep dogs, or loud animals around to make noise when something is amiss. Set up a neighborhood crime watch program.

13. Observe the movement and behaviors of unfamiliar people. If they seem suspicious, report their actions to law-enforcement authorities. If possible, videotape or photograph strangers that arrive at your barn, and record the license plates and types of vehicles. Many people casing your property may come out looking like a happy go lucky family with a male, female, and child or two. They may come in an old vehicle, but not necessarily a pick-up truck, in the guise of wanting to pet or feed the pretty ponies. If you have a recorded image or license plate number, if shortly thereafter something is missing, you have a lead to provide law enforcement agencies.

14. The biggest advantage that Horse thieves possess in not getting caught and you never getting your Horse back is YOU !! Jobs , school , money to look for the Horses all make a time limit or certain period when you give up or just have to stop looking. The Horse thief can sit on your Horse for a week or more... Even longer if they know eventually you are going to get discouraged or run out of free time to conduct a proper search for your Horse ! The main reason a person finds their Horse is because they never give up and continue to look, search and spread the word about their Horse being gone. They renew posters and always make sure to continually contact everyone everywhere. Sometimes after a very extensive and long period of searching, the Horse thieves will actually release the Horse or put it in a very conspicuous location knowing it will be found. Why ?? So they do not get caught !! You win instead of the thief wearing you down !

**I sincerely wish that such a part of my web site was not needed or used so often by Horse owners all over the globe... Yet that being said. Someone is going to give up and someone is going to have the Horse ! Will it be you or the Horse thief ???**

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