

# *'Talking Horses'*<sup>TM</sup>

equestrian and veterinary healthcare topics

*Fall 2014*

**'Winterizing Your Horse'**



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# 'WINTERIZING YOUR HORSE'

*Dr. Gregory Beroza*

As we in the northeast and many other regions of the country are preparing for our impending winter season, it's time to reflect on the appropriate health care of our equine companions. Whether or not you are personally responsible as your horse's owner, legal guardian or best friend for their healthcare, it is nonetheless our moral obligation to best care for the comfort of these amazing animals during the winter months, no matter the circumstances. Winter brings cold weather, snow and frozen water and heating pipes. Fresh clean frost free water is a necessary mainstay of all living beings and our horses



require their sizeable daily portion of potable water. First off, make sure all the pipes to your barns are sufficiently protected from freezing.

*Horses Winterized in Snow Turnout*

Properly applied, heat tapes are well worth it. Please be careful in the application of heat tapes because, wrapped too closely around pipes so that they cross, they can short or burn themselves out and can cause fires. Where appropriate, space heaters and heat lamps can be used, however, not all types are safe for use in barns. Make sure any extension cords, outlets, fuse boxes and services are properly grounded and of sufficient size to carry the increased winter electrical loads. If you are in doubt about any of these electrical recommendations, please check with a qualified electrician to assure your barn and horses' safety.

Unless heated automatic watering sources are being properly used, outdoor water buckets often freeze. Being outside for several hours, eating dry hay without water, and being returned to a barn with more dry hay and undesirable ice cold water, is an unplanned and unfortunate set-up for a horse developing a digestive tract impaction. We often must think for and take appropriate precautions for our horses, no different than we would to protect our children from winter's worst elements. Regular and timely feeding of warmed grained mashes enriched by adding dietary oils for digestive tract lubrication, is a good method for increasing a horse's necessary water intake and keeping their stools appropriately softer. Lesser winter volumes of food may be sufficient to nourish our horses due to their decreased activity, but some horses require the same, if not more feed, due to their increased need for energy to produce heat. Because of their long winter coats, our horse's true body condition may not be readily apparent. Know your own horse and check their body condition by putting your fingers through its dense winter coat and feeling the muscling underneath, as each horse is uniquely individual.



*Foot Iceball-no Pads-  
Borium Heel Caulks*



*Foot w/o Iceball-Snow Pads-  
Borium Heel Caulks*

Horses should be properly blanketed, and during the colder windy winter days, horses should not be turned-out for as long a period of time as you would otherwise do during the warmer months. During the extremely cold days, it may be more appropriate to keep them in the barn or turn them out for only an hour or two daily. While it makes for a beautiful picture postcard to see horses standing knee deep in fresh snow; practically speaking, it can often be more dangerous than it appears. Horses' feet can ball up with snow or ice, causing them to slip, slide or be unable to get proper traction. Snow pads are one solution to lessening this problem. Borium and/or heel caulks applied to the bottoms of our horses' shoes are another helpful solution. Care must also be exercised that horses not panic from being entrapped in knee high or chest deep snow which can cause them to act in unpredictably dangerous manners. Horses can break bones in their feet and legs from poor footing, compounded by dangerous behavior, and they can even panic due to their perceived entrapment in the snow.



*Horses Too Deep in Snow Drift*

Blankets and leg wraps can be used, both indoors and outdoors, to help your horse conserve their body heat. Each should be applied appropriately to avoid other problems. Making your horse too warm by excessive blanketing, both inside and outside the barn, is possible and should also be carefully avoided. Unless your horse is properly acclimated to the winter's worst weather, the temperature difference in conditions between inside and outside the barn can cause a horse to sweat and lose even more valuable water. Just like with people, the cold wind blowing over your horse's body increases the chill factor; and this is its worst enemy. Excessive wind can create a more significant problem than the lowered temperature itself.

Try to provide your horses with a covered structure or wind break if they are to stay outside for any significant length of time, during the winter. You will find horses migrating to protection from the wind, when they need it most. Similarly, seal barns from any drafts or air leaks, especially if the barn isn't heated. A well insulated draft free barn filled with horses usually doesn't need auxiliary heat during average winter conditions, to keep it above freezing. Collectively, horses' body heat is amazingly warm. This can be yet another reason not to turn some, if not all, of the horses out during the most severe winter days. Heated barns should be kept above freezing, but not so warm that horses don't grow a sufficiently protective winter hair coat. Be aware, however, that no ventilation whatsoever can create its own problem, leading to increased respiratory disorders. This issue is best accessed via the help of qualified veterinary and architectural/contractor input.



*Scenic Winter Snow; Horse & Groom heading back to the Barn*

Winter time is often a slower and less intense time for equestrian use. So, this is a good time to catch up on several veterinary health care responsibilities such as examination and floating of our horses' teeth. Late fall-early winter vaccinations, useful against respiratory viruses, are just as prophylactically important as are their use against flu in people. Horses housed more closely increase their opportunities for

sharing respiratory viruses and parasites, also making deworming very timely and appropriate. Any and all of these important equine medical issues should be discussed with and addressed in conjunction with your veterinarian, as part of your overall supervised healthcare program.

Let us hear from you. Send your comments to [talkinghorses@hosedoc.com](mailto:talkinghorses@hosedoc.com) or comment about articles to the [www.HorseDoc.com](http://www.HorseDoc.com) blogsite. For additional equine healthcare information about this or other subjects, please review the '*Talking Horses*' materials on the [HorseDoc.com](http://www.HorseDoc.com) Blogsite and/or call the **Long Island Equine Medical Center @ 631-427-2213.**

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## 'Winterizing Your Horse'

Dear Equestrian Friends, Enthusiasts & Readers,

'Talking Horses' is a publication that is available in print, on the web, via radio, photojournalism, television and video transmission. It is primarily designed and developed to discuss various equestrian and veterinary healthcare topics. Subjects are selected and discussed based upon their timeliness, seasonal appropriateness, and response to reader inquiry and interest. Readers are encouraged to submit their feedback and subject suggestions to the publisher; the 501(c) 3 non-profit **Long Island Equine Medical Foundation**. There is no charge for the information that is disseminated. Donations are encouraged and appreciated to defray the costs of production and publication. Committed volunteers in journalism and social media are equally welcome. We also gratefully thank our corporate sponsors for their financial support. We hope you appreciate and enjoy each of our seasonal publications.

Sincerely,

**HORSEDOC**<sup>®</sup>

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