

FACE INVESTIGATION

SUBJECT: FARMER KILLED WHEN KICKED BY HORSE

SUMMARY

On November 9, 2002, a 32-year-old male farmer died after being kicked in the chest and head by a horse. He was alone in the pen with four horses while currying one of the horses in a poorly lit area of the barn. The horse he was currying, had injured both back legs in a fence. When the victim failed to return to the house within an hour, the victim's wife found him and called 911. The EMS arrived and performed CPR while transporting the victim to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The FACE investigators concluded that to help prevent similar occurrences, farmers should:

- **Observe safety precautions with animals**
- **Perform duties in well-lit areas**

INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 2002, a 32-year-old male farmer died after being kicked in the chest and head by a horse. He was currying his injured horse in a poorly lit area of the barn, using a lantern for light. FACE was notified of the incident on November 11, 2002 via the newspaper. The death certificate, sheriff's report and the coroner's report were reviewed. A letter about FACE and a request for an appointment was sent to the victim's wife, because they had no telephone. This farmer and his wife were raised on farms in community settings that depended on horses rather than powered machinery or electricity.

On June 16, 2003, Two FACE personnel, the FACE director and the field investigator, traveled to the farm where the incident occurred. Interviewers unexpectedly met the brother-in-law of the victim on the road while looking for the farm. He stated the victim's wife left the area following the incident. The brother-in-law was congenial and helpful in explaining the incident.

The pen where the incident occurred was 24'6" x 13'6". The victim was found approximately 7' from the wall and the currying brush was about a foot behind him. His hat was found near the opposite wall. In June when FACE investigators were there, the pen where the incident occurred was under new construction. The brother-in-law informed the investigators that four horses were in the pen because the construction of the other pens was not completed at the time of the incident. Due to the construction, no photographs were taken.

The victim was 32 years old and farmed in a different state before relocating to the area to farm with the brother-in-law. They farmed together approximately 1½ years prior to the incident. The brother-in-law stated that the victim was very familiar with the horses and stated because it was a routine at the end of the day, he surmised that the victim was

very relaxed and talking quietly to the horses while he was currying them. He noted that this occurred between 8PM and 9 PM so it would have been dark in November at this time of the day. He also noted that it was cloudy, so the moon wasn't bright either. He stated the pen was very poorly lit, so it was speculated that the victim didn't notice the injury on the back of the horses legs as he was currying and may have brushed over that area without realizing it, causing the horse to kick him.

INVESTIGATION

At the end of the day, the victim and some of their children would do the milking and other chores. Usually the victim would feed the animals and come into the house or curry one of their four horses. The evening of the incident, all four horses were in the same pen because the building of the new pens was not completed. Normally after currying the horses, the victim would go back into the house.

On the evening of the incident, the victim's wife heard him throw down the silage for the feeding about 8 PM. When he didn't come into the house, she looked out and saw a light on in the barn. She thought he must be getting the horses ready to drive in the morning and she dozed off. When his wife awoke at approximately 9 PM, she noticed the light was still on in the barn, so she went out to check on him. She found her husband lying on his side in the pen. The victim was found lying on his right side with a gash on his face. She heard him take a gasping breath, but he was non-responsive. She ran approximately ½ mile to the nearest telephone to call the EMS. She also flagged down some friends who were driving by on the road, and requested their help. They came to the scene with her and assisted in giving information to officials at the scene.

The County Sheriff and a city EMS responded. One of the officers began CPR until the EMS arrived. The victim was transported via ambulance to the hospital. Upon arrival, reportedly the victim had no pulse and no respirations. The bruise on the victim's right side of his chest appeared like a hoof mark plus he had a laceration on the left side of his chin extending into his beard.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death was suffocation as a consequence of facial trauma. The victim's jaw had been fractured with some of his teeth pushed back into his palate, which probably caused the victim to suffocate.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

- **Recommendation #1: Observe safety precautions with animals**

Discussion: When working with animals, it is important to be familiar with each one and their particular habits, in addition to observing any changes in their health or behavior and the reasons for it. In this case, because the horse was injured, it may have been important to separate this horse from the other horses, because the injured horse may have been nervous and was trying to protect his injured legs. The sense of touch is highly developed in horses. Sensitive areas, in addition to the head, ears, and the flank are the lower legs. While brushing and rubbing may help to desensitize these areas and increase

the horse's acceptance to handling, a person must always be careful when working around these areas. At a minimum:

- Know the animals one is working with and their habits.
- Separate an injured animal from others to prevent further injury.
- Be sure the animals are secured with a halter and tied up with a lead rope when working with them.
- Speak softly while moving into the horses "blind spot"(out of his line of vision) or behind the animal.
- Use a brush rather than a metal currycomb on the most sensitive areas.
- Do not attempt to approach an injured animal that is acting in a dangerous manner. Call your local veterinarian for assistance.

- **Recommendation #2: Perform duties in well-lit areas**

Discussion: The victim used a lantern for light in the pen. The pen was in an area of the barn that was dark and had no light fixtures. This particular evening was described as cool and cloudy becoming foggy into the evening. If the victim had used multiple lanterns, perhaps he would have been able to see the injury on the horse's legs, which may have prevented the horse from kicking when he was curried. It is also possible that the animal could have "spooked" from shadows of movement of other horses or the victim due to the dim light.