RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Approaching, Catching, and Haltering Horses Safely[1]

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INTRODUCTION

This is a sheet about safety in handling horses. It has been prepared for the first-time, as well as the experienced-horse owner. No matter how experienced one is in handling horses or how well one knows his/her horse, one must remember that in handling a large animal which weighs 1,000 pounds precaution and safety should be practiced at all times.

Horses tend to be excitable and can be frightened by the most unexpected circumstances. If one is not prepared for such an emergency he/she may find him/herself dragged, crowded, or stepped on; all of which lead to the possibility of serious injury.

This sheet discusses proper approach to and the catching and haltering of horses.

APPROACHING

Always approach a horse from the left and from the front, if possible. Speak softly when approaching, especially from behind, to let it know of your presence. Always approach at an angle, never directly from the rear. Horses have monocular vision which leaves them with a blind spot in front of their nose, under their head and directly behind them. Sudden sounds or movements, particularly within these spots, tend to frighten horses. When you are within reach, touch the horse first by gently stroking the shoulder or rump (if approaching from the rear) and moving calmly to the head.

Don't walk up from behind and slap its rear end or suddenly lunge for its head.

CATCHING AND HALTERING

Carry a lead rope attached to the bottom noseband ring of a halter when you go to catch the horse. Once beside the horses shoulder, slip the rope around its neck and secure it by holding both sides in the same hand. This enables you to exert control in the event the horse starts to walk away. Do not tie the rope around its neck! Grasp the horses nose with your right hand, slide the halter up over its nose with your left hand and place the crownpiece behind its ears. Do not drag the halter over its nose. Some horses are tickled by the nosepiece when it bends the large hairs on the nose and face. This can cause them to raise their head or try to move away from the halter.

Make sure the halter is fitted properly. The chin strap should be short enough to keep a foot from getting caught or prevent it from slipping over the nose, yet allow the horse to breath comfortably while standing or galloping. The noseband should be loose enough to allow two fingers between the nose and the noseband. This allows the horse to open its mouth while limiting the space at which an object can become tangled. The

cheekpiece should be long enough to allow two fingers between the noseband and the cheekbone.

The horse owner has the option of turning horses out with or without a halter. Some feel that leaving a halter on the horse in the stall or paddock presents a potential hazard in the horses getting caught on something. On the other hand, a haltered horse is much easier to catch in an emergency situation.

Once your horse has been properly fitted with the halter, it is ready to be led.