



Equestrian Safety at the Forefront for the Pony Club Movement

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Participate in any form of horse-based sport, whether it be polo, eventing, steeplechase, drafting, dressage or pony club, and one has to adhere to firmly enforced but common sense safety requirements. Equestrian helmets, boots, and other apparel are only the start, and complement animal handling strategies, crowd and vehicle separation, and layers of experienced supervision. These sports led by their various Associations and Federations have had to generate appropriate risk management strategies in order to continue to exist as sports, and importantly to gain the requisite public liability insurance. Literally no ticket, no ride.



Pony Clubs now represent one of the fastest growing leisure activities, and TestSafe has had, for some time, a close relationship with the Londonderry Pony Club. By agreement, it operates on a 10-acre parcel of land owned by WorkCover, and TestSafe has a more than passing interest in the safety of its operations. At a recent Zone 19 Jamboree, more than 180 riders participated in a wide range of events. TestSafe annually awards the TestSafe Shield to the Club adjudged

to have the best musical ride team, based upon a group of riders (approx 12) who perform intricate horse crossovers, patterns and dressage movements to music. In events such as this, safety is paramount for the riders ranging in ages from 6 to 18 years of age.



This is in stark contrast to those areas of commercial agricultural activity where horses are commonly used in the mustering of cattle. The cultural change that has occurred in equestrian activities has yet to be commonly adopted into these rural workplaces. But this might be about to change. In a recently completed landmark court case mounted by WorkCover NSW, B.H. McLachlan Pty Ltd, the owner of a typically large rural property in South Western NSW, pleaded guilty to breaches of occupational health and safety laws for the death of one of its overseers, Daniel Croker, and was fined \$96,250. The jackeroo mates who found Mr. Croker's body gave evidence in court that they still do not wear helmets when they ride a horse but usually do so when they ride a motorbike.

Justice Haylen in his decision made the observation that: -

" The evidence demonstrates the slow awakening of the rural community to its obligations....and the need to rethink its everyday work practices. Performing work on the same basis that it has been done over many years will no longer meet these obligations".

(See Insp.Chris Chadwick v B.H.Mclachlan (NSW) Pty Ltd 2004, NSW IR Comm.331)

His Honour heard evidence in Sydney on the 1st October 2004, as to the failure or absence of safety systems, which contributed to the fatality occurring. These included: -

- Inadequate back-to-base communications.
- Poorly implemented induction procedures.
- Absent station manager at the time of the accident (managing two stations at the one time).
- No specified work safety procedures for overseers.
- No risk assessments prepared for spotting and mustering bulls even though the mustering practice in the paddock had been conducted in the same way for many years.
- No readily available PPE for horse riding.
- No established communication links to neighbours.
- No channel or call signs readily available in work vehicle.
- Work vehicle had a flat tyre at the time of the accident.



All in the name of safety. Impromptu speech by Peter Harley, at the Londonderry Pony Club, Sunday 8.30am

Farm Associations have responded that the Occupational Safety Laws do not recognise the unique nature of farms as a workplace. According to Jock Laurie, Chair of the NSW Farmer's Association Industrial Relations Committee,

" Farms are more isolated and in many cases employers have far fewer resources at hand to manage unrealistic O.H. & S issues." "Recent moves to enforce the wearing of helmets have been met with concern, particularly as most employees simply refuse to wear them because they are generally very hot and uncomfortable in summer."

(The Don Dorrigo Gazette 24 Nov.2004)

Clearly the Pony Club movement and the Equestrian Federations around Australia with their common-sense approach to the safety of members have lessons to pass on to other rural-based industries.