



The Carrot Post

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New No-Blood Rule vs. Swiss Law

No Blood Rule is now THE Blood Rule

Today, November 7th, in Hong Kong, the Fédération Equestre Internationale voted 56–20 (with two nations looking politely at their shoes) to approve a rule that will now allow horses to continue competing while bleeding, so long as officials decide it's the right kind of blood.

We asked the well known Swiss Foundation "Tier im Recht" yesterday before the voting if a possible dilution of the No-Blood Rule could be seen critical in the light of national Swiss animal protection law.

This is their full statement (published 6. November 2025 with kind permission of the foundation):

From the perspective of the Foundation for Animals in Law (TIR), the current regulation must be retained in order to better guarantee the welfare of horses used in competition.

Any bleeding constitutes an injury to the body and is a warning sign. In equestrian sports, there is a high risk of actions that are relevant to animal welfare. Therefore, bleeding should always be taken seriously. However, it is difficult to make a legal assessment and general statement about blood on horses. Bleeding alone does not necessarily constitute a violation of animal welfare legislation. It depends on the exact circumstances and may require an investigation. This should be carried out if the cause is unclear. If it is not feasible within the context of a competition, for example because no muzzle is available, the examination must be stopped and the horse checked by a vet.



However, according to tournament veterinarian Dr Witzmann, mouth injuries are always attributable to human influence and would therefore be relevant under animal welfare law: "Blood or bloody foam on a horse's mouth is often explained away with the unproven "alibi cause" that the horse has bitten its tongue or lip. Neither the numerous TTA reports nor surveys conducted during TTA training courses mention tongue biting during riding or driving, and our own experience at national and international tournaments cannot confirm this "self-harm"; all lesions in the mouth, including those on the tongue, are attributable to external human influence." Source: https://www.vetline.de/system/files/frei/DPT_10-2022_Witzmann.pdf

Art. 26 para. 1 lit. a TSchG makes the mistreatment of animals a punishable offence. Mistreatment is defined as any behaviour that causes an animal pain, suffering, harm or fear of a certain significance. The provision is therefore closely related to the general principle of Art. 4 para. 2 TSchG, which prohibits the unjustified infliction of such stress – all of which are considered equivalent from a criminal law perspective. Conduct that constitutes an offence includes not only physical effects, but also the infliction of fear and terror. It is not necessary for the pain, suffering, harm or fear to be continuous or repeated. Nor does the act in question have to be particularly cruel or 'torturous'. However, the impairment of the animal's welfare must be of a certain intensity and thus go beyond mere discomfort. It is therefore sufficient if the stress is one-off but considerable and significantly impairs the welfare of an animal.

Unjustified harm and thus mistreatment within the meaning of Art. 26 para. 1 lit. a TSchG can therefore be assumed if a horse's blood supply is cut off by the action of the reins or improper fastening of the bridle to the mouth, or if severe injuries to the palate, tongue, lips or mucous membrane occur. Such pain and injury can only be justified in emergencies, for example in the case of a runaway horse. A sporting competition does not usually constitute such an emergency situation. If a horse with a bleeding mouth injury continues to be ridden, even though the injury is known and the lesion is irritated and possibly aggravated by continuous rein action, this is also considered abuse. The same applies to the use of spurs on previously injured flanks.

Unfortunately, there is no clear case law on blood on horses during equestrian events. In Switzerland, we are only aware of one case involving a bleeding horse during a competition. During the 2016 CSIO St. Gallen, Martin Fuchs' horse 'Clooney' had a bloody scratch on its flank. This was presumably caused by the heavy use of spurs. The investigation was closed because the injury was not serious enough:

'According to the St. Gallen public prosecutor's office, the offence of mistreatment/animal cruelty has not been committed. Due to the 'minor bleeding injury', it cannot be established that the horse suffered – this "injury" was too minor for that.' Source: <https://www.tagblatt.ch/ostschweiz/stgallen-thurgauer-springreiter-fuchs-untersuchung-wegen-tierquaelerei-eingestellt-ld.652872>

Since 2003, TIR has had access to all animal welfare criminal proceedings reported to the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (BLV) and records them in an anonymised form in its own database. These cases can be viewed on our website (<https://www.tierimrecht.org/en/>). The animal welfare criminal case database contains three further cases of bleeding horses. However, these animals were injured during training, LU22/139, LU21/003, SO09/012

In general, it can be said that prosecuting animal welfare violations in equestrian sports is difficult. The use of pressure- and pain-inducing aids and aversive training methods means that violations of animal welfare legislation are likely to occur frequently. However, law enforcement agencies in Switzerland are often reluctant to take action. In this country, criminal proceedings for animal cruelty in equestrian sports are rarely pursued. This suggests that animal welfare legislation in the field of equestrian sports is not being consistently enforced by either sports associations or law enforcement agencies. We see a clear enforcement problem in the current situation. For this reason, it is particularly important that existing internal association rules for the protection of horses are not watered down.

About:

The Foundation for Animals in Law (Tier im Recht – TIR) is a leading, politically neutral Swiss non-profit organization that has advocated for strong legal animal protection since 1996. It is considered a competence center for all questions concerning animals in law, ethics, and society. Its main purpose lies in the continuous improvement of the human-animal relationship through the application and further development of the law.

<https://www.tierimrecht.org/en/>