

PROVINCIAL OFFICE

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Charitable Registration # BN 11881 9036 RR0001

Mayor and Council
Victoria City Hall
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

May 28, 2018

Dear Mayor Helps and Council:

I am writing with regard to an incident that occurred on May 4th at Ogden Point. As you are likely aware, on this date two trolley horses were involved in a traffic accident, causing them to fall and in be in significant distress for more than five minutes. Emergent video of the event is alarming and demonstrates handlers were not adequately trained in emergency procedures, nor in control of a situation which posed a serious threat to public safety and the animals' welfare. This incident requires a strong response from Council. **The BC SPCA recommends Council prohibit the operation of horse-drawn carriages and trolleys on Victoria's streets, limiting their operation to the safer park environment.**

Issue:

According to the operator, Victoria Carriage Tours, this accident occurred when a bus pulled up directly behind the trolley being drawn by the horses. As the trolley prepared to advance, it rolled back and hit the front of the bus. This collision caused the harness to slacken, knocking the horses, Chris and Matt, off-balance. Chris fell, pulling Matt down with him in the middle of the road.

Video of the incident shows at least one attempt by handlers to bring the horses to their feet while still affixed together, resulting in another fall. Members of the public can also be seen pulling at the head and neck of both horses, grabbing on the tail of one horse, and walking around and behind the legs of both, placing themselves in danger of injury. It is not until more than five minutes into the video that the harnesses are finally removed and the horses are able to successfully return to their feet.

Bettina Bobsien, BSA, DVM, Dipl ABVP [Equine], a veterinarian and equine specialist, had this to say about the incident:

I cannot directly comment on the events that led to the horses falling, but I am concerned by the apparent lack of emergency training regarding what to do once the horses were on the ground. The harnesses should have been removed immediately, not after the horses had been struggling for at least 5 minutes on the pavement. Helpers were not directed to stay away from the leg side of the down horses, putting them at significant risk of injury. A broader issue is the cause of the accident, a reportedly impatient bus driver. Traffic and congestion in and around our cities in southern BC has increased markedly in the past decade. Combine this growth with a population that is now "three generations off the farm", and we have a pace of life and lack of understanding about horses that does not

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welcome their presence on city streets. This has resulted in many of our most inveterate horse riders staying off the roads for safety reasons. It is sadly time that we may have to take that same decision for our carriage horses, at least those working outside of a slower-paced park setting.

The content of the video contradicts statements released by Victoria Carriage Tours. The company initially indicated both horses remained calm throughout and patiently waited for handlers to remove their harnesses. However, the footage shows this to be untrue. The handlers prompted the horses to stand while still harnessed, putting them at further risk of injury. It is evident the **handlers did not have an appropriate strategy in place to safely resolve the incident.** The operator also failed to disclose the length of time it took handlers to adequately assess the situation, remove the harnesses, and successfully help the horses to their feet. It is decidedly troubling that Victoria Carriage Tours chose to inappropriately downplay a serious incident which put the public at risk.

Background:

The BC SPCA has played an important role in regulating the horse carriage industry in Victoria. Highlights include:

- Developing carriage industry regulations in collaboration with the City and carriage companies in 2009. Prior to this the industry had been self-regulated.
- Performing stable inspections to ensure horses and their facilities are acceptable to humane and industry standards since 2010. Veterinary herd health check records have also been provided to the BC SPCA twice per year.
- Creating a communication framework by BC SPCA animal protection officers, city staff and carriage operators to efficiently respond to incidents and welfare concerns from the public.
- Continued consultation between BC SPCA animal protection officers and external equine experts.
- Since 2009, ongoing recommendations from the BC SPCA have been brought to Council for improvements to horses' welfare on the streets and at the farms. As a result, Council has adopted multiple amendments to the original bylaw. The most recent recommendation included introducing clear identification for each horse, making them recognizable to the public.

Recommendations:

The BC SPCA recommends Council prohibit the operation of horse-drawn vehicles on Victoria's streets. If tours continue, they should only take place in the safer park environment to reduce dangers to public safety and animal welfare. Permitting the continued operation of horse-drawn tours on busy streets places horses at risk of injury or death. In light of this most recent accident, it is imperative Council mitigate the significant risks associated with horse-drawn tours by ending the practice on traffic-congested streets.

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The BC SPCA also advises that horse-drawn vehicles be limited to those which only require one horse to operate. This would likely prohibit the use of trolleys in Victoria, restricting tour operations to carriages only. The introduction of this condition would reduce public safety concerns and decrease the risk of injury to a horse should another incident occur.

In addition to proposed location and size restrictions, the BC SPCA recommends the following operational requirements be introduced to the industry:

1. Establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) and emergency management plans (EMPs) for urgent situations. To be licensed, companies operating carriage tours should have SOPs and EMPs in place, established with review by an equine veterinarian. The BC SPCA would be willing to play a role in reviewing these SOPs and EMPs.
2. Create a report form, required by any licensed operator to be completed following any incident occurring during working hours in the City of Victoria. The form should include reporting requirements for: incident description, location, time, duration, and any witness details.
3. Require each operator to have an emergency kit for each vehicle containing an extra halter, 4 traffic cones and first aid kits for both people and horses.

I look forward to continued dialogue on this matter to better protect horses, improve public safety and reduce the risk of further incidents. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any questions or concerns.

Kind regards,

Craig Daniell
Chief Executive Officer

Relevant Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9z28ilCSos>

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/video-of-carriage-horse-fall-in-victoria-not-what-it-looks-like-operators-say-1.3931621>

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1395218>

BC SPCA Position Statement on Animals in Recreation, Sport and Entertainment:

<https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/leaders-in-our-field/position-statements/position-statement-animals-recreation-sport-entertainment/>