



## Carriage operators criticized

### Vet's inspection cites animal health, stabling

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By Allyson Bird

Charleston's most comprehensive inspection of its carriage tour industry this week compared some of its practices to 19th-century thinking — "when the carriage business was important for commerce, but animal welfare was not."

That's one of veterinarian Amy Hayek's more stark conclusions in her analysis of the city's five horse-drawn tour companies completed in May and June.

The report, the first since the city imposed stiffer regulations on the industry, found that:

Tourists by the carriage-load descend on the Holy City every year, filled with wonder curiosity.

- Only one company feeds its horses enough hay.
- Some owners barely keep records and rely on veterinarians to maintain that information for them.
- And, in the particular offense that Hayek likened to the 1800s, the city's regulation-sized stall proves too small for a draft horse to turn around.

The inspection report comes just months after People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals sent a letter to Mayor Joe Riley and the Charleston City Council asking for a carriage ban. And just weeks ago, a woman who boards horses accused Carolina Polo and Carriage Co. of neglecting its animals.

A city investigation into those allegations remains ongoing.

Releasing the inspection report, tourism management director Vanessa Turner-Maybank noted "myriad problems" Thursday and said the report found "things we are concerned about and disappointed at."

The inspection noted shortcomings in stabling, animal health and general operations and maintenance. It set deadlines for each company to make necessary changes to meet city code.

"Herd health for equine animals is not a new concept, but it is to Charleston carriage company owners," the report said.

Charged with assessing whether companies care for their horses in a humane fashion, Hayek said Thursday that "most carriage companies at least gave the appearance that that was their goal as well."

She suggested stalls extend at least 12 feet by 12 feet, while the city only requires 5-feet-9 inches by 11 feet. That size, she wrote in her report, can harm horses' digestive health and muscle function.

Hayek wrote that some carriage attachments made at incorrect angles and heights could harm the animals, and some improperly tacked horses suffered from open wounds. Carriage owners did not know weight limits spelled out in city code and often required little training for drivers, according to the inspection.

The city hired Hayek, who runs East Coast Equine in St. George, a facility that offers acupuncture, chiropractic services and preventive treatments for horses. She said in the interview that her candor came from impartiality.

"I'm not their regular veterinarian," she said. "I don't see those horses on a regular basis or those owners."

Andrew McGauley, owner of Olde Towne Carriage Co., said he appreciates the suggestions but takes his own veterinarian's advice first.

"For an outsider vet to come in and give us suggestions when our own vet has her suggestions for to take care of our horses ... sometimes that doesn't match," he said.

Tom Doyle, owner of Palmetto Carriage Works, sat on the city's tourism subcommittee that spent years developing the current code for carriage tours. He said some of the recommendations outlined in the inspection extend beyond city regulations but, as the only operator found to provide his horses with ample space and hay, he liked the findings.

"I can't but help but think it's going to be a good thing for the city," Doyle said. "My thing has always been transparency. You can't do dirty work behind an open door."

## **CARRIAGE TOUR OPERATORS**

*Problems noted in the city carriage company inspection:*

### **Carolina Polo and Carriage Co.**

- Altered medical records
- Entire barn wet
- Employees clean with chlorine bleach which, when mixed with ammonia caused by urine, proves deadly
- All animals showed mineral deficiency
- Horses ate shavings because they lacked enough quality hay

### **Classic Carriage Tours:**

- Recommended one horse be removed from work because he is 200 pounds underweight and has other medical problems
- Front of stalls wet
- Not much hay in rations
- Some indications of muscle dysfunction related to ill-fitting equipment

### **Olde South Carriage Co.:**

- Small front stalls
- High levels of ammonia and dust
- Poor air flow
- Many horses taking medications for pain, joint problems and not sweating

### **Olde Towne Carriage Co.:**

- Underweight horses
- Ill-fitting harnesses
- Difficult to find fire extinguisher at stables

### **Palmetto Carriage Works:**

- Some horses fat but not necessarily fit
- Drivers noted turning completely around to face passengers and then excessively tugging at mules' reins in traffic.