



Horses Without Carriages International™
global support for a ban on horse-drawn carriages

Go the Way of the Horse and Buggy

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A citywide ban on horse-drawn carriages is long overdue

By Elizabeth Forel

New York is one of the most congested cities in the world. It is no place for slow-moving horses pulling flimsy carriages mixed in with taxis, fire trucks, police cars and buses.

In January 2006, a horrific accident occurred on 9th Avenue and 50th Street that involved a young carriage horse named Spotty, who was returning to his stable. Reacting to unknown stimuli, he bolted frantically into traffic, smashing into a station wagon and wrapping himself over the vehicle, the carriage still attached. He was later euthanized and his driver hospitalized in a coma. Unfortunately, this is typical horse behavior.

This was the beginning of our campaign to shut down the inherently inhumane and unsafe horse-drawn carriage trade in New York City, an industry that has no more than 160 active members but remains politically entrenched. It is an industry that a majority of New Yorkers want banned.

At that time, we needed to re-educate politicians, media and even activists. Today, the issue has caught on and has received much publicity. Several other organizations are also involved. It is an issue whose time has come.

More and more people around the globe are becoming sensitized to animal suffering and want it to stop. From cities legislating a ban on bull fighting or animal circuses to campaigns to ban inhumane horse-drawn carriages in Rome, Vienna, Chicago, Cozumel and Atlanta, to name a few, the time has come for animals to be given their due. To an enlightened populace, ethics, morality and compassion trump selfishness and greed every time.

The New York City law allows these dispirited carriage horses to work for nine hours straight, seven days a week between the shafts of their carriage, either pulling or parked waiting for a customer—bored, captive, not even able to scratch an itch.

As herd animals, horses need turnout to pasture to mingle with other horses, graze on grass and mutually groom each other, a great stress reliever. This does not exist in the New York City stables. The five-week so-called furloughs will never substitute for daily turnout.

The horses live in four multistory stables on the far west side of Manhattan, where the stalls, legislated at 60 square feet minimum, are less than half the size experts recommend—stall guidelines for voluntary certification by the New York state Horse Health Assurance Program are 144 square feet for mid-sized horses and 196 square feet for larger drafts. These stalls are mostly on the upper levels, accessed by a steep ramp.

Since July 2011, there have been 11 carriage horse incidents, including one horse death, that of Charlie, who dropped dead on Oct. 23, 2011, while pulling a carriage. Several others were due to the horse spooking, but on Nov. 4 and again on Dec. 4, a horse collapsed on the street while pulling a carriage. There is no reporting requirement in the law, so it is probable that many more accidents occur and go undocumented.

Every poll that has been taken since 2006—including those by CBS, The Wall Street Journal, New York Daily News and Extra—shows 75-80 percent of respondents favor a ban of the industry. Currently, we have over 122,000 signatures on an online petition in support of the Avella/Rosenthal state bill to ban the New York City carriage industry.

While the people want a ban, politicians are a different matter. In 2009, the Teamsters began to represent the carriage drivers. It is not a real union shop; there is no collective bargaining or benefits, and owners and drivers are in one local. Only about half of the owners and drivers are members. But, as a strong union, the Teamsters wield much influence with City Council members who could otherwise make a difference.

The city has enabled this tiny business for years, granting such things as under-market rent for a city-owned stable, killing a Council bill that would have mandated sprinklers and quashing a bill that would have prevented the horses from going to slaughter auctions, the latter thanks to Council Speaker Christine Quinn.

Currently, drivers are not accountable for horses sold outside New York City, so it is not known where the majority of them go—a huge turnover of 60-70 horses each year.

Our goal is to see the industry shut down and the horses retired to a sanctuary or a good home. It is time to move New York City into the 21st century with compassion for all beings.

Elizabeth Forel is president of the Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages.