



## ALBERTA 4-H COUNCIL

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Dear Alberta 4-H Equine Leader,

### IMPORTANT PROPOSED CHANGE to Alberta 4-H Equine Policy

Welcome back for the 2010-2011 Alberta 4-H Club year. We are looking forward to another great year working with volunteer 4-H Leaders and Members as they develop lifelong skills and lasting relationships.

Alberta 4-H Council reviewed the Equine policy and after much discussion and consideration have proposed a change to be discussed with 4-H Stakeholders.

The **proposed** policy 6.06 Alberta Equine Project Policy would read:

**DRAFT “It is a requirement that a properly fitted ASTM/SEI (American Society for Testing and Materials Safety Equipment Institute) or BSI (British Standards Institution) approved equestrian helmet be worn for all mounted 4-H events.”**

The major reason that the Council decided to recommend this change was to reduce the risk of horseback riding injuries to our equine project members.

### **What does this mean?**

- In the 2010-2011 4-H Club year helmets are not required but recommended as previous years.
- Clubs, Districts and Regions will have an opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on how to best implement the new helmet policy. The feedback from each region will be brought to Alberta 4-H Council through the Council rep.
- Based on the feedback, Alberta 4-H Council’s Provincial Equine Advisory Committee will provide a recommendation on how to proceed with implementing helmets.
- Just as bicycle helmets and hockey helmets became accepted, equine helmets are quickly becoming the norm in the equine world. This policy change is being reviewed and implemented slowly to ensure proper Alberta 4-H Council protocol is followed and that all 4-H stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input.

Alberta 4-H Council welcomes all questions, suggestions and both positive and constructive comments on how to implement a mandatory helmet policy. Please discuss at club, district and regional levels. Please provide your feedback to your Alberta 4-H Council Regional Representative. To find out who your Alberta 4-H Council Representative and or Provincial Equine Advisory Committee member is, please view the attached or visit [www.4h.ab.ca](http://www.4h.ab.ca) or email [susann.stone@4hab.com](mailto:susann.stone@4hab.com) phone 1-877-682-2244 or (780) 682-2648).

Sincerely,

Stacy Price  
President, Alberta 4-H Council

### Alberta 4-H Legacy Builders





## Alberta 4-H Equine News and Updates

### Important Proposed Change to Alberta 4-H Equine Policy

The Alberta 4-H Council, reviewed the Equine policy and after much discussion and consideration we have a proposed change to be discussed with 4-H stakeholders:

The proposed Policy 6.06 *Alberta 4-H Equine Project Policy* would read:

**“It is a requirement that a properly fitted ASTM/SEI (American Society for Testing and Materials Safety Equipment Institute) or BSI (British Standards Institution) approved equestrian helmet be worn for all mounted 4-H events.”**

Comments, suggestions, questions can be brought to Alberta 4-H Council through your regional representative. To find out who your representative is please visit [www.4h.ab.ca](http://www.4h.ab.ca) or call toll free 1-877-682-2244 or (780) 682-2648.

The major reason that the Council has decided to recommend this change is to reduce the risk of horseback riding injuries to our equine project members.

Statistics for head trauma due to horseback riding incidents are alarming. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics approximately 20 per cent of injuries in young riders are to the central nervous system. The majority of these injuries are cerebral contusions, concussions, or skull fractures. Use of approved helmets has been associated with a decline in the occurrence of severe head injuries.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information states that all degrees of head trauma severity can have important and long-term implications, but moderate to severe traumatic head injuries can significantly impair physical, cognitive, emotional and social functioning.

Any injury can be considered a tragedy. There are no words for a head injury that could have been prevented. A mandatory helmet policy is a proactive way to reduce the risk of head trauma – a serious and often irreversible injury – associated with horseback riding.

Many jurisdictions in the 4-H program across North America are setting helmet policies in place. Currently Nova Scotia and British Columbia have a mandatory helmet policy and numerous states in the USA have a mandatory helmet policy. This “trend” is here to stay.

**Concern:** As a leader, will I be held liable if a member does not wear an approved helmet while riding and gets hurt?

**Response:** Currently there are no insurance requirements for helmets, so your insurance will respond whether or not the helmets are used and therefore leaders will be protected.

**Concern:** It’s my head (my child’s head) and it should be my choice to take that risk.

**Response:** At an organized event where liability is involved, safety is everyone’s business. Lack of structure and safety measures can lead to added costs and restrictions. More importantly, head injuries can affect the rest of your life. In the interest of everyone involved, it is vital that organizations do due diligence and safety planning.

**Concern:** A helmet is an added cost, especially when I have more than one child in 4-H.

**Response:** The cost of a helmet is minimal compared to any other aspect of owning a horse. The price is around \$60 for an approved helmet. The cost of serious head trauma is considerably higher.

**Concern:** A helmet isn't "cool" and it doesn't follow traditional western riding attire.

**Response:** Most western gear and equipment is designed for safety, comfort and practicality. Even the traditional cowboy hat was designed to protect the rider from the elements. Recent tests and technology have enabled us to significantly increase our methods of safety and protection. Approved helmets come in a variety of designs from traditional western styling with stitched leather finish, to an assortment of colors and decals, to a conventional English riding hat style. They have become progressively more popular in all disciplines of riding, including western and stock horse events. Once you've dismounted, you can remove your helmet and sport that trendy ball cap.

**Concern:** Helmets are uncomfortable and hot.

**Response:** Helmet design has evolved to focus on safety *and* comfort. Helmets come in a wide range of sizes, which allows for a proper fit, regardless of head shape. In some models the fit comes in varying degrees of adjustability. Some helmets have removable sweat-wicking liners while others have soft foam padding. Newer technology has allowed for increased ventilation without compromising the safety structure. Try on as many different helmets as you can to find the right fit and style for you.

**Concern:** Helmets get dirty and smelly.

**Response:** There are a range of very effective helmet cleaning agents and deodorizers available which do not compromise the integrity of the foam protection.

**Concern:** My child is an experienced rider and has a very safe horse. She or he does not need to wear a helmet.

**Response:** A study conducted by a team of Alberta researchers found that the highest incidents of injury occurred among the more experienced riders. Riders who reported an injury had an average of 27 years of riding experience. Source, Equestrian Injury Study: Injuries Common Among Experienced Riders,

**Concern:** My child will be penalized for wearing a helmet in the show ring.

**Response:** All judges used by the 4-H program understand and appreciate the value of wearing a helmet.

**Concern:** Helmets give me (my child) a headache.

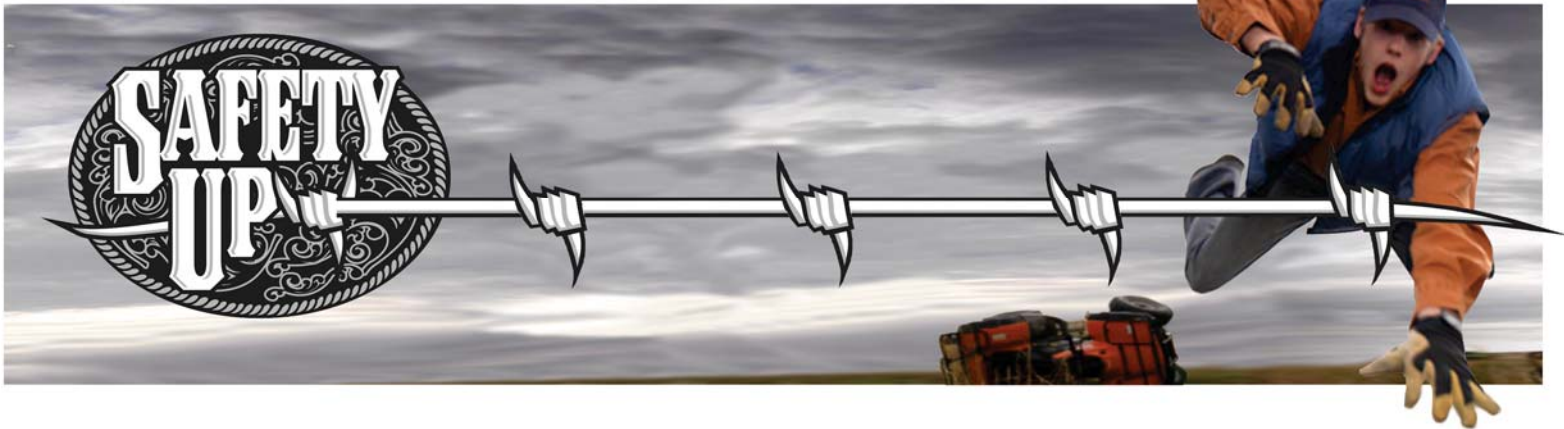
**Response:** The solution is to find a helmet that fits properly.

**Concern:** I already have a (bicycle, ATV, hockey) helmet that I wear.

**Response:** ASTM/SEI and BSI approved helmets are the only head protection equipment tested for the various scenarios of horseback riding. They take into consideration height of a potential fall, speed, terrain (they are designed to skid on the ground, and less likely to catch trees while riding in the bush etc.) and absorb sharp objects (hooves). They are lightweight so as not to interfere with balance of the rider, and protect all around the skull without impairing vision. For these reasons bicycle, ATV, snowmobile, skiing and other extreme sports helmets are not adequate.

**Concern:** I know how to do an emergency stop and dismount.

**Response:** Emergency stops and dismounts are useful skills to learn, but they don't replace a helmet if you take a fall. Falls can happen so quickly that you don't know you are going to come off, leaving you no time to prepare.



## Safety Up – On Equestrian Helmets

Have you ever been asked that million-dollar question: What is your head worth? For those who enjoy riding horses and the freedom it gives, the answer to that question should be: My head is priceless.

Statistics have shown for years that the single most effective way to reduce the risk of potential head trauma while riding a horse is to wear an approved helmet designed for equestrian activities. **Know the hazard. Know the job. Know the drill.**

### Design

Equestrian helmets are designed to protect a rider's head in two ways. First they reduce penetration by sharp objects (the protective shell), and second absorb some of the force, giving the head a "cushion" thus increasing stopping distance (the foam padding). All models of ASTM/SEI approved equestrian helmets are tested in a lab to ensure that they are up to regulated safety standards. You can find the SEI certification symbol on each approved helmet.

Helmets intended for equestrian activities come in many sizes and although generally use the same protective foam, are built differently than other sporting helmets. They cover more area of a rider's head and are designed for specifications of riding a horse, taking into account possible terrain, speeds and objects to which a rider could be subjected. They are built to skid rather than stick over rough terrain and to absorb impacts created by sharp objects such as a horse hoof or sharp rock. They are also designed to be secured properly to a rider's head and be light enough to not interfere with a rider's balance.

Other sporting helmets such as a bicycle helmet or motorcycle helmet either don't provide adequate head coverage, or they are too heavy and bulky to be used for riding.

### Brain Buckets...

If you ride horses, your helmet really is your best friend. Read on.

- Horseback riding carries a higher injury rate per hour of exposure than downhill ski racing, football, hanggliding and motorcycle racing.
- Medical Examiner reports show that 60% or more of horse-related deaths are caused by head injuries. Helmets can reduce this possibility by 70-80%.
- Repeated trauma to the head, even when minimal, can cause cumulative damage to the brain. Each new incident expands the original damage and the brain cannot recover 100% from injury.
- Non-ASTM/SEI certified helmets offer no protection whatsoever and are strictly for cosmetic purposes.
- Head injuries are the most common reason for horse-related hospital admissions.

## Structure

Because a riding helmet will absorb the force of a blow or fall, the foam padding is destructible. Once a helmet has absorbed an impact, the foam padding condenses and never regains its original shape. It will no longer provide adequate protection. A destructible impact could be a fall from a horse or simply being dropped on to a hard surface. For this reason **once a helmet has been through a fall or direct impact of any sort, it must be replaced.** It also needs to be replaced at least every five years as the foam deteriorates over time and becomes less effective. All ASTM/SEI helmets contain a manufacturer's date with the SEI seal.

Some manufacturers offer replacement helmets at a reduced price for those that have been impacted. This information should be contained in the box with the helmet in a "User's Manual" or on a tag attached to the helmet. To take advantage of this policy usually requires the original receipt.

### Why replace the helmet?

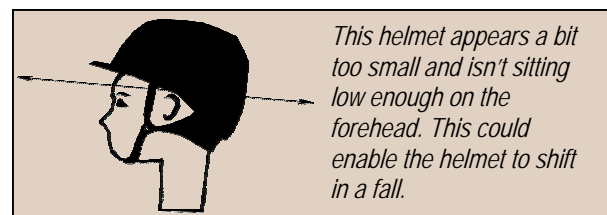
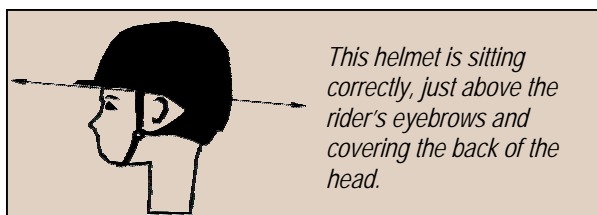
Glues, resins and other materials used to make the helmet eventually break down, affecting the interior liner. As well, regardless of use over time the protective foam becomes brittle. The inside liner will also start to deteriorate when it comes in contact with hair oils, body fluids and/or cosmetics over time. All this, in addition to normal wear and tear, leads to helmet degradation. Always check the manufacturer's date located with the SEI certification seal.

## Fit

Fit has a direct impact on the effectiveness of a helmet. A comfortable helmet is also more likely to be used regularly. It is a good idea for a rider to try on many helmets before settling on one, as each model fits a little differently. Some basic guidelines for fitting a helmet are:

- The helmet should fit around the entire skull and sit just above the eyebrows.
- It should feel snug, but not uncomfortably tight. If the helmet is gently wiggled, the skin around the forehead should move with it.
- All straps must be comfortably fastened with little play. Normal conversation should not be affected, but if the mouth is opened as if yawning, this should pull down on the helmet.
- If the helmet needs additional padding for a more secure fit, go with a smaller size or another model.
- Remember that the fit of a helmet will relax a little with use, so a snug fit is essential.

A properly fitted, well adjusted, and correctly positioned helmet is more likely to remain in place during an accident, will give the most protection available for the design, and will be the most comfortable to wear.



## Care and Storage

Extreme heat temperatures, UV rays, chemicals and solvents will damage the foam in a helmet. For these reasons a riding helmet should not be stored where temperatures can exceed 40 degrees Celsius, left out in the sun or stored near any chemicals. This would include a vehicle on a hot day, in a cabinet or tack box with bug repellent or bleach in it, or in a tack room with sunshine peaking through the window onto the helmet.

To clean a helmet use a mild detergent on the exterior for hard shell helmets, or use a brush on velvet. Helmet deodorizers and cleaners are available on the market and are recommended for the inner lining. Never leave a helmet in direct sunlight or near a heat source to dry.

### On standards testing...

ASTM (originally known as the American Society for Testing and Materials) is one of the world's most respected standards organizations. Volunteers from many fields review current versions of headgear standards and propose changes to the standards. The ASTM standard is widely used internationally as a basis for the standards developed in other countries.

### ...And certification

SEI is Safety Equipment Institute, which certifies protective equipment in a number of areas, including head protective products. Any product bearing the SEI mark is manufactured to stringent requirements. In the case of equestrian helmets, every helmet bearing the SEI mark must be able to satisfy the impact and retention requirements of the ASTM standard, which is proven to reduce the risk of head injuries in equestrian activities.

## The last word

While enjoyable, horseback riding is an inherently dangerous sport. Riders can minimize the hazards significantly with proper training and by wearing the proper gear. Studies prove that helmets can reduce risk and severity of brain injury so long as they are used consistently and properly. Wearing a helmet just gives a rider that added piece of mind.

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