



Horse Environmental Awareness Program

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CONNECTICUT

Home Base -- Creating A Sacrifice Area: Can You Afford Not To?

Sacrifice Area sounds like a place where grisly happenings occur. In fact, its purpose is to *prevent* the gruesome things that can happen to exercise lots and pastures that are not planned and managed well. Perhaps better known in the horse world as **Dry Lot, Turn Out Lot, Exercise Lot, Corral, or Paddock**, the term **Sacrifice Lot** was coined by grazing management enthusiasts. The concept is that a selected area is *sacrificed* from the grazing system and is used to confine animals in order to protect pastures from over-use at critical times (i.e., winter months, wet soils, and times of slow pasture plant re-growth -- rest periods). They can be the key to good pasture management, especially where horses are concerned. They are also excellent in terms of horse management such as preventing over-consumption of lush pasture forage, and in juggling the turnout of compatible groups of equines when pasture area is limited. In cases where there is no pasture at all, horses may spend 100% of their outdoor time in this area. *Few facilities in Connecticut can afford to be without a properly designed sacrifice lot.*



A well-surfaced sacrifice area.

Benefits of a Well-Planned Sacrifice Area

- Hoof-friendly surface for better horse health
- Reduction of mud and ice
- Ease of manure removal/management
- Improved aesthetics
- Reduction of manure- or soil-laden runoff to water bodies
- Reduction of fly-breeding habitat
- Improved pastures utilizing the sacrifice area as a management tool

What Makes a Well-Planned Sacrifice Area?

1. Minimal Size - Reducing the amount of bare soil on your equine facility will help you to achieve all of the listed goals of BMP's, as well as reduce the distance you must wander with pitch fork and wheel barrow in your daily quest to remove manure. Consider the space needs for your particular herd, groups, or individual, and the amount of pasture and riding exercise that supplements their turnout time. Create a Sacrifice Area that is no bigger than what you require. Keep in mind that *there are limits to a particular property's ability to support animals*. Sadly, you may have to face the fact that you just cannot house the number of horses you'd like to at your current location without causing detrimental impacts to the environment. In some cases this challenge may be answered by drastically reducing turnout time and space, combined with meticulous manure management and disposal.
2. Create a Good Surface - You may need to remove as much of the fine-textured "topsoil" as is practical, and replace with 8-12 inches of well-draining gravel. Compacting the gravel well with machinery will help to lock the larger particles (stones) in place. Gravel should be well-graded, meaning it should have an assortment of particle sizes from sand and some fines up to stones of one inch in diameter. Larger stone size may be detrimental to hooves, and even a base containing 1" stone may need to be covered to prevent bruising. You may wish to top with stone dust or sand for a hoof-friendly footing. A good surface is a key part of any mud-reduction plan. Some areas may require subsurface drainage (curtain or tile drains) where seasonal perched or high water tables exist. Spots that are particularly troublesome due to heavy traffic and/or wetness (NOT wetlands!) may benefit from the use of a geotextile covered with 8+ inches of gravel base and your choice of surface material.
3. Location - The most convenient areas are generally near the barn. However, it is most important that the sacrifice area be located away from wells, wetlands, and water bodies. Strive for a minimum of 200 feet separating distance when possible. Utilize other BMP's such as *Vegetated Filter Areas and Water Diversions (including roof gutters)* to help overcome shortcomings. Slopes of 2-4 % will reduce ponding of water, and will have less erosion than steeper slopes. A slope of 2 % means that over a distance of 100 feet, the elevation will change by 2 feet. Grade the area to drain away from barns.

4. Daily Manure Removal - Regular removal of manure from the lot surface will result in less polluted runoff leaving the site, and will help to prevent the incidence of mud. *Left in place, organic matter in the form of manure or wasted feed and forage will get churned into the surface, increasing the water holding capacity of your lot, which means more mud!*

Contact

- Eastern Connecticut RC&D
24 Hyde Avenue
Vernon, CT 06066
(860) 373-7408

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