



The Atlanta Carriage Horse Industry An Animals' Angels Investigation

1. Introduction

The investigation of Atlanta's Carriage Horse Industry was triggered by multiple calls and emails received by Animals' Angels from concerned individuals, who reported that the horses were exposed to substandard conditions and inhumane treatment. Some of the pictures shown in this report were provided to Animals' Angels by a source not affiliated with the organization. All information about the industry & complaints were obtained by Animals' Angels via Freedom of Information Act Request. Of note, none of the regulating agencies Animals' Angels approached were helpful or quick to provide the requested information.

2. Background Information

Atlanta currently has two carriage horse companies, 12 horse drawn carriages and 13 registered carriage horses. The horses are housed in two stables, both located on Tift Street:

Fantasy Carriages LLC:

Established 2008

521 Tift Street SW, Atlanta Georgia 30310.

Owner: Cecil White.

www.fantasycarriagesllc.com

Nottingham Shire & Carriage for Hire LLC:

556 Tift Street Atlanta Georgia 30310.

Owner: Amanda Araim.

www.atlantacarriages.com

<http://www.carriageforhire.com/index.html>

The third company, Capitol Carriage owned by Edward Gates, closed in 2011 after multiple complaints, failed inspections and exposure of sub standard conditions by Fox news.
<http://www.myfoxatlanta.com/story/17870173/i-team-carriage-house-closes>

From their stables, the horses travel to five carriage stands in downtown. They are located at Peachtree St/International Blvd, Centennial Olympic Park Dr/International Blvd, Peachtree Center Ave/International Blvd., Pryor Street Underground and Park Ave West/Baker St.

In Atlanta, the horse drawn carriages are allowed to operate for hire on weekdays after 6:30 pm and on weekends after 1pm. Every day of the week the carriages must be off the street by 6am to avoid morning rush hour.

**Regulating Agencies:****Georgia Department of Agriculture/Equine Health**

Mat Thompson - Manager

Tel: 404-656-3713 Fax: 404-463-2128

Email: mark.thompson@agr.georgia.gov<http://agr.georgia.gov/equine-health.aspx>

Information from website: Equine health is responsible for enforcing the Humane Care for Equines Act, the Equine Act of 1969 and excerpts of the Animal Protection Act. Enforcement of these laws is achieved through the inspection of equine sales, abuse complaints, stables and events.

Atlanta Police Department

Division of Taxicabs & Vehicles for Hire

818 Pollard Blvd Sw Suite 241

Atlanta, Georgia 30315

Office: (404) 546-3090

<http://www.atlantapd.org/divisionoftaxicabsandvehiclesforhire.aspx>

The APD Vehicles for Hire Division enforce the City of Atlanta ordinances that pertain to horse carriages. They also issue the horse carriage driving permits and inspect the carriages.

Fulton County Animal Services

860 Marietta Blvd NW

Atlanta, GA 30318

404-613-0358

<http://www.fultonanimalservices.com>

Fulton County Animal Services Officers enforce the Fulton County animal ordinance and state animal related laws

Laws & Regulations:

The carriage horse industry is regulated by the *Atlanta City Ordinance, Chapter 162, Division 7 (Equine Drawn Vehicles)* which provides guidelines regarding working & housing conditions, work hours and treatment. However, a violation of this ordinance only results in temporary removal of the equine in question from work and a fine not to exceed \$100.00.

3. Observations & Complaints

Over the course of the last three years, multiple complaints about Fantasy Stables & Nottingham Shire and Carriage for Hire have been filed with Fulton County Animal Control, Georgia Department of Agriculture and the Atlanta Police Department.

A) Housing Conditions for the Horses**a) Nottingham Shire & Carriage for Hire:**

The premises on Tift Street are approx. 2 acres. The horses are kept in an open run-in shed and a fenced in paddock. There is a grassy area on the premises, however, it is fenced off and the horses do not have access to

it. When it rains, the paddock is often flooded and entire area is extremely muddy. Pictures taken by eyewitnesses confirm that at times, the horses have little to no bedding and very limited space to get out of the rain. The pictures also show that the horses eat their hay in this extremely muddy environment and that their manure is piled up right next to the hay feeder. Due to poor drainage observed, it is likely to take weeks for the paddock area to dry after a heavy rainfall.



Flooded paddock and hay feeder in mud



Horses left without sufficient bedding in pouring rain



Horses eating from feeder placed in mud next to manure piles



Roof in disrepair

Multiple complaints about the conditions for the horses were filed with the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Pictures taken on 3/16/11 by an inspector for the Department confirm these observations, however, no action was taken according to the records provided. On 1/13/12, Mat Thompson, Manager of the Equine Health Section, instructed the owner of Nottingham Shire to pick the paddocks of manure, the repair the barn and to cover the manure piles. Nothing has happened. None of the documents obtained show that any fine was ever given to the owner for violation of the ordinance.

The Atlanta ordinance requires that:

Bedding in stalls and stables shall be highly absorbent and comfortable, if in direct contact with the equine and shall be provided as follows:

- (1) Bedding shall be deep enough so as to adequately absorb wetness.
- (2) Bedding so used shall not be a type that will harm or in any way be a discomfort to the equine.

- (3) Bedding shall be deep enough to provide adequate cushion and support.
 (4) Surfaces, including floors, with bedding shall be free of odor and waste and shall be cleaned and disinfected regularly.



Pictures of horses standing in deep mud taken by Georgia Department of AG inspector

*This photo depicts the end of the property line.
 The mud field is set apart from the
 grass by a fence, and the horses
 are only allowed on the all-mud side.*

2/3/2011

*Nottingham Shire & Carriage
 556 Tift Street SW
 Atlanta, GA 30310*

Note written by inspector after visiting premises

b) Fantasy Stables LLC

The premises of Fantasy Stables contain a 12 stall barn and (until 2012) a small dirt lot. Over the past years, the Georgia Department of Agriculture has received numerous complaints about the condition of the dirt lot. Their own investigators documented mud close to 12 inches deep as well as filthy, plastic water buckets with very little water for the horses. According to public documents and Animals' Angels observations in January of 2014, the horses are **now kept in indoors stalls, the dirt lot is no longer in use.**



On 2/25/11, the Equine Division of the Georgia Department of Agriculture received a complaint from the Atlanta Police Department about a carriage horse being “**down and potentially injured**”. When Animals' Angels requested more information about this incident, both the police department and the GA Department of AG responded that there were **no records available**. Mat Thompson from the Equine Division of the GA Department of AG stated in an email: “Concerning the horse that went down in 2011, we never saw this horse. He was treated by a vet and removed to the owner’s private farm. This incident was late at night. The vet said he had a virus”.

Fantasy Stables owner Cecil White also leases some property in Douglasville, where he keeps some of the carriages horses whenever they are not working. According to public documents, the Equine Division of the GA Department of AG and the local police have already been called to this location. Concerned neighbours had reported emaciated horses, frozen water troughs, insufficient access to food and the horses standing in ankle deep mud. However, the police officer dispatched to the premises apparently did not find anything wrong regarding these living conditions and no action was taken.



According to the police report, the officer was informed by a renter (no affiliation with the horses or Cecil White), that the thin sorrel horse was thin due to “cribbing”. According to the police report, this information was never questioned.

The inspector of the GA Department of AG noted that: “there was no obvious sign of illness, except the sorrel who might need vet attention to regain 10% body”. Nothing in the requested documents indicates that the horse really received veterinary attention or that any of the agencies involved followed up to check on the condition of the horse. **The horse has since been moved to an unknown location.**

When Animals’ Angels investigators visited the premises on 1/21/14, they also noted that the horses were standing in ankle deep mud and appeared to not have a dry resting space. There were only three horses on the property, one black carriage horse and two grey carriage horse “prospects”, all were in good condition.

B) Condition of Horses & Work Environment

In Atlanta, all carriage horses are allowed to be worked from 6:30 p.m. until 6:00 a.m., Monday through Friday and from 1:00 p.m. until 6:00 am on weekends. When the carriage horses leave the stables and start heading to the carriage stands, they have to find their way through streets with heavy traffic – a dangerous endeavour.

Accidents involving horse drawn carriages have already resulted in severe bodily harm of non-expecting passengers: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/04/17/injured-atlanta-speeding-car-hits-horse-drawn-carriage/>

While the accident was not the carriage driver's fault, the incident still makes it very clear that there is no room for horse drawn carriages in the 21st century traffic of Atlanta. Not only are the horses forced to inhale the exhaust fumes, which is likely to cause respiratory problems, they are also exposed to risky overtakes of impatient cab drivers, rushing emergency vehicles and honking horns.

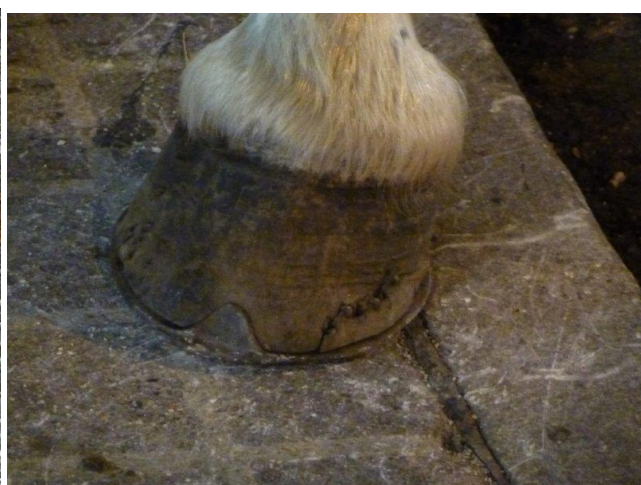
The major problems seen in carriage horses stem from four main health care areas- bone and muscle injuries, tack related problems, shoes and feet and heat/cold stress along with some management/husbandry concerns.

Respiratory problems are also a great concern as the video taken June 1st, 2013 of a carriage horse struggling to breathe and left unattended for extended period of time with no access to water confirms:

<http://youtu.be/aSY7rXmZS8U>

The dark bay horse shown in the video was named "Misty" and was owned by Fantasy Stables. A formal complaint was filed with the Equine Health Section of the GA Department of AG. Per Mat Thompson, a veterinarian diagnosed Misty with a condition known as anhidrosis. A horse with anhidrosis does not sweat efficiently enough to dissipate body heat and is therefore prone to body heat quickly rising to dangerous levels. The veterinarian advised that she was not fit to be used as a carriage horse because of this condition. According to public documents, the horse was removed from the working horse group on 6/17/13. However, Misty was observed working again on 3/1/14.

Condition of feet and hooves are problematic because of the hours spent on hot, dry and hard surfaces. The constant pressure and concussion cause horses to have split or damaged hoof walls and to have sole tenderness or soreness. Additionally, housing horses in wet, muddy or damp areas will soften and weaken hooves and lead to weak feet, bacterial and fungal infections and lameness. Countless photographs taken of Nottingham Shire & Fantasy Stables horses show that many of them have severely split and cracked hooves while pulling carriages. Additionally, rest areas provided to Nottingham Shire horses on Tift Street appear to not offer enough dry space, the pictures show the horses standing in deep mud and manure. Horses were also documented working with loose or ill-fitting shoes.



Sec. 162-157. - Shoes.

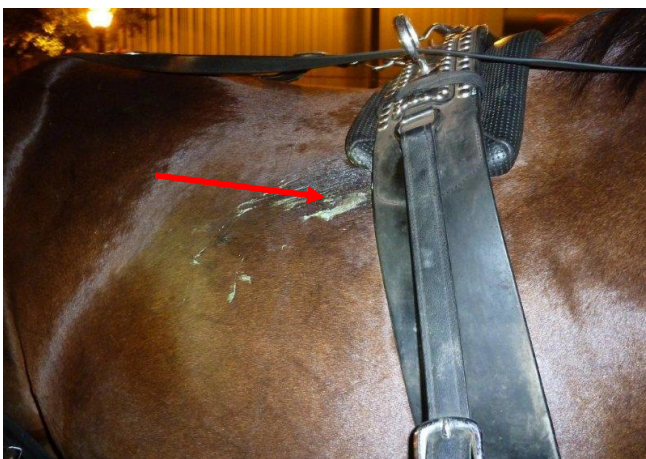
No equine shall be used to pull a vehicle for hire without properly fitting shoes on each properly trimmed hoof. Should an equine throw a shoe during its shift, the time and location must be noted on the trip sheet, and the hoof must be examined by the driver and any nails removed.



Horses with loose shoes observed during their working shift

Other areas of concern are **tack (harness, shaft, neck collars and bits and bridle) rubs, abrasions and skin damage**, especially during Atlanta's hot & humid summers. With too much work in short time spans without enough time off to recover or with ill-fitting or poorly repaired tack these problems can become major and potentially cause long term damage to the horse.

Photographic evidence provided shows multiple horses working with tack/harness sores as well as very poorly repaired tack. On 8/17/13, eye witness accounts attest that they saw a dark bay horse working while "puss was dripping from a large sore" and that a strong, foul odor was noticed. The eye witness documented the horse while still in harness and later (8/20/13) at the Tift Street location of Nottingham Shire. Again, a formal complaint was filed with the GA Department of AG. However, when the inspector visited the premises the next day, **the horse was gone and could not be located.**



Discharge from open sore

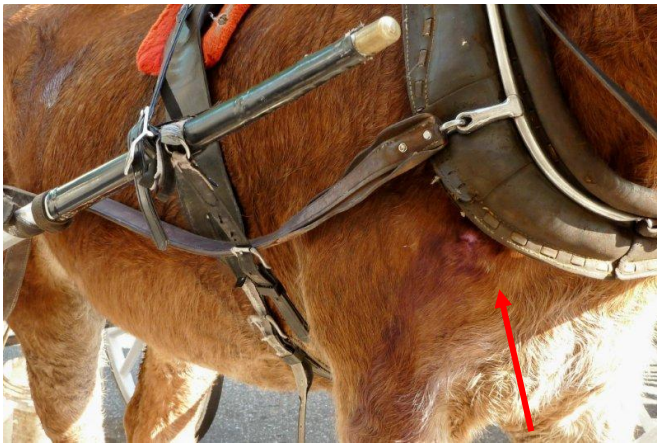


Horse with sore in muddy stable paddock

Sec. 162•151. •Health of equine.

No equine shall be permitted to pull any vehicle for hire unless the equine is in good health and meets at least the following requirements:

- (3) The equine shall have no open sores or wounds, shall not be lame or have any other ailment.



Horse with bleeding sore below harness



Horse with knee injuries, likely from falling

Overloaded Carriages

Also commonly observed are horses forced to pull carriages with way too many passengers, which is a violation of the Atlanta city ordinance.

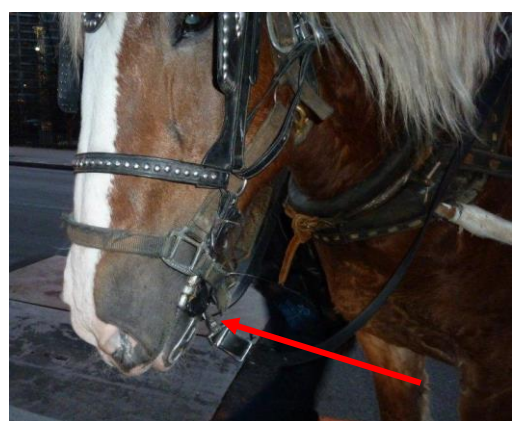
Sec. 162•152. - Equine working conditions.

(a) No equine used as provided in this article shall be worked under any of the following conditions and any owner allowed to let the conditions exist will be found in violation of this article:

If the equine or combination of equine shall pull any combined weight, including passengers and driver, in excess of two times the equine's body weight. No equine or combination of equine shall pull any vehicle which is occupied by a number of persons which exceeds such vehicle's normal safe seating capacity;



Horse pulling carriage with 7 adults & 4 kids



"Fixed" with black tape

Access to Water

Sec. 162-158. - Water.

Adequate water for equine pulling vehicles for hire will be provided in the stables at all times and in working areas as often needed and as climate and working conditions require.

On July 13, 2013, concerned citizens noted that the water source, where the horses usually were getting their drinking water during work shifts, had been turned off and the spigot had been removed. When contacted about this, a representative of the Department of Vehicles of Hire, which is in charge of the horses and the carriages while they are working, confirmed that the water had been turned off because of homeless people using the water. The representative also stated that the drivers would have to go to the surrounding restaurants and ask them to give them some water for the horses.



Former water source disabled

The situation remained unchanged, while temperatures in Atlanta rose to 92 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity close to 100%. In September 2013 it was reported that a solution of the problem was in the works and that a meter would be installed on one of the nearby fire hydrants payable by the carriage horse companies. The City of Atlanta Watershed Management was to oversee installation of payable meters for the horse operators to use while the horses waited for customers. In February of 2014, Animals' Angels requested an update on the situation from the Department of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire. Supervisor Obierika stated that he had absolutely no idea whether or not the meters had been installed or if they would be in place soon. He admitted to not having been at the location at least 5 or 6 weeks.

Conclusion:

A review of housing and working conditions for Atlanta Carriage Horses showed several areas of concern:

- Housing conditions are inadequate, especially in times of heavy rainfall the open stalls of Nottingham Shire offer not enough protection against the elements.
- Horses are forced to work with ill-fitting shoes and rubbing harnesses, which cause infected sores and lameness.
- Sufficient access to water during working shifts is questionable.
- Enforcement of the Atlanta ordinance for equine drawn vehicles created to protect the horses' well-being is virtually non-existent.
- Problematic horses disappear to unknown locations.