

## Horse Proofing Your Property

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As an equine veterinarian, I see the self-destructive capacity of horses on an almost daily basis. I often joke with owners that you could lock certain horses in a padded cell and they would still figure out some way to injure themselves. That said, the majority of injuries we see are due to a few big offenders: smooth wire fences, wheel lines, barb wire, bungee cords, and sharp sticks.

High tension smooth wire fences, also known as New Zealand fences, can cause severe injuries, despite not looking all that dangerous. If this type of fence is electrified, it tends to be a little safer since horses will respect it more. However, we see several cases per year in which horses kick between the wires, and then get their leg stuck as they try to pull it back out and panic. The high tension wire quickly saws through the extensor tendons on the front of the leg, and sometimes through the front of the hock joint. Depending on how much damage is done, this type of injury can require months of bandaging and sometimes euthanasia. If the fence is electrified, the charge can further damage tissue at the wound edges, making any suture repair very difficult.

Everyone knows barbwire fences and horses don't mix well. We see surprisingly few injuries from barb wire, probably because it's not commonly used anymore, and if it is used it's normally as a top strand over a no climb fence, where it's hard to get tangled in. One unexpected way you can get into trouble is with barbwire lying on the ground across trails or other areas where you might be riding. Be watchful when riding for any old fencing, and if you see any give it a wide berth or dismount and get it well out of the way. If a horse puts a foot through a loop, they will panic and the loop can act like a snare.

Why on earth would a horse tangle with a wheel line? I have no idea, but it happens all the time. Injuries sustained from wheel lines tend to be serious, as horses often get trapped in them and struggle to get out. Wheel lines are constructed fairly stoutly, so this usually requires either dismantling of the wheel or, very unfortunately, the horse. Please strongly consider keeping wheel lines and horses separate. If you do irrigate your pasture with a wheel line, move it to the end of the field and fence off with electric tape before turning the horses out. Or think about making an investment in a safer type of pasture irrigation equipment, like K-line irrigation pods. This is preferable to making an investment in a large veterinary bill!

Sure, bungee cords look harmless, and again, why would a horse mess with them? Not sure, but we've seen bungee cords through a horse's lip (looks like a fish on a line), and through their eyelids. Don't use them to secure gates, hang feed buckets or hold stall doors open. A better choice is a closed eye bolt and a smooth metal snap.

Finally, sticks are major offenders and since they're sharp, long, and dirty, make for very contaminated, deep puncture wounds. We have seen sticks jammed through the skull (think unicorn), through legs,

and up into the groin. They can also cause run of the mill lacerations. Trim trees, especially junipers, above head level, and don't throw your trimmings in a pile in the corner of the pasture, because your horse will no doubt choose to roll next to it, or run through it in the middle of the night! Pick up all loose wood projectiles and consider using them to roast marshmallows.