

Serenity Beginnings - After over a year of working to close the Pacific Equestrian Center, Serenity along with help from Animal Control takes in 23 horses and re-homes over 50 others. Read about this breaking news here.
Auburn woman pleads not guilty to horse abuse

By Akiko Fujita Published: Apr 29, 2008 at 6:58 PM PDT Last Updated: Nov 20, 2008 at 7:08 PM PDT

KING COUNTY, Wash. -- An Auburn woman pleaded not guilty to four counts of animal cruelty months after county animal control officers and city code investigators removed nearly 50 horses from her property.

Court papers allege half a dozen horses at Pacific Equestrian Center were infested with lice and suffered from rain rot. But in court, owner Dean Solomon denied any wrongdoing. "She's in a horse rescue operation and these horses came to them in very poor condition and they were doing what they could to treat them and make them better," said Solomon's attorney Mark Prothero.

Auburn Code Compliance Officer Don Stephens says piles of horse manure lined Solomon's barn when he visited her property in January. At least four dozen horses crowded the 11-acre lot, which contained four times the number of animals allowed by city code. "I couldn't put it to you in tons or poundage but let's just say there was an awful lot of waste," Stephens said.

Stephens says Solomon insisted she had an agreement with the county to take on more than the code allowed. She removed horses from her property after he and animal control officers pressured her.

Court documents allege Solomon starved and neglected animals in need of medical treatment. One horse had hooves that were extremely overgrown and was foot sore in all four feet. A veterinarian euthanized two horses that were "unnecessarily suffering and in considerable pain," documents state.

Veterinarian Charles Emig says the horses were sick before Solomon rescued them. Emig helped her treat the animals and says Solomon took on more than she could handle. "Some of them are going to fall by the side like war," he said. "But she has done more good than she does harm and she has absolutely not starved them."

Emig insists Solomon nursed at least 30 horses back to health last year and adopted them out. Only one remains at Solomon's property in Auburn, but Emig says she purchased 10 new horses at an auction a few weeks ago and cared for them on a property he refused to identify.

Nearly two dozen horses are now at Serenity Equine Rescue in Maple Valley.

Prosecuting attorney Julie Klein requested that a King County judge order the newly acquired horses be removed from Solomon's property as well. His decision is expected later this week.

Animal Control was called to Solomon's property, Pacific Equestrian Center, in Kent, WA in February of 2008. A veterinarian had found six horses who were extremely thin and had lice, court papers said. One horse was already deceased, and two additional horses were so ill that they had to be euthanized.

Animal control officials said that they received several complaints about mistreatment, the condition of the property, and other problems pertaining to the care and treatment of Solomon's animals. The three dead horses were removed from Solomon's Kent, WA property in February of 2008.

Animal Cruelty charges were filed in April of 2008 in King County Superior Court. Solomon was charged with four counts of animal cruelty after King County Animal Control Officers verified that more than half a dozen of her horses had been starving and suffering from severe lice infestations.

Court documents allege that Solomon failed to provide her horses with food, water, shelter, sanitation, and medical attention. Solomon's horses were forced to live in filthy conditions, with many of them standing in mud that completely covered their hooves. While these conditions were horrific, many of Solomon's horses faced an even worse fate: They repeatedly showed up at feedlots, where an unknown number of them tragically lost their lives in slaughterhouses.

Charging papers only sited Solomon for neglecting eight horses, but there were actually as many as 80 horses crowded on Pacific Equestrian Center's grounds. In November of 2008, Solomon pleaded guilty to Second Degree Animal Cruelty, a misdemeanor. 2nd degree Animal Cruelty was only a misdemeanor in 2008, but as of April 2010 with Pasado's Safe Haven's help, it is now a Gross Misdemeanor. Solomon, then 49, faced a suspended sentence in exchange for community service. The terms of the plea agreement stated that Solomon was allowed to keep four horses, but that she must let King County Animal Control see the animals.