



ALBERTA ASSOCIATION OF HARNESS DOG SPORTS ("AAHDS")

CODE OF CONDUCT, ETHICS AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Last updated: Nov 2023

1 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR AAHDS MEMBER

1.1 GOAL

- 1.1.1 The AAHDS Code of Conduct extends to all members, guardians of Junior members, persons assisting a team, volunteers, coaches and spectators

2 CODE

- 2.1 A member of AAHDS must:
- A. Not knowingly place themselves in a situation that could give rise to a conflict between personal interests and the interests of AAHDS
 - B. Comply at all times with the bylaws, policies, rules and regulations of AAHDS, as adopted and amended from time to time, including complying with any contracts or agreements executed with or by AAHDS.
 - C. Participate in a spirit of fair play and honesty.
 - D. Abide by the laws of the jurisdiction of the province or country in which the event is taking place.
 - E. Refrain from using alcohol and cannabis during AAHDS events; Nicotine may be consumed in alignment with provincial law and host site agreement.
 - F. Be courteous and respectful to other members of the athletic community.
 - G. Refrain from the use of profane, insulting or offensive language; bullying will not be tolerated.
 - H. Refrain from public criticism of other members of the athletics community.

- I. Respect the dignity of others.
- J. Display an active support of AAHDS.
- K. Act in a manner that will bring credit to the athletics community and themselves.

3 CODE OF ETHICS DURING THE PRACTICE OF HARNESS DOG SPORTS

3.1 Responsibility and Sportsmanship

- 3.1.1 The participant is responsible for the behavior of their dog(s) at all times and must have control over them.
- 3.1.2 The participant has a duty to educate people on the practice of harness dog sports and must demonstrate the benefits of the sport for both the dog and the human. They must be a positive ambassador for the sport.
- 3.1.3 The participant is expected to ensure that their dog has relieved themselves before a trail activity somewhere that is not disruptive to other trail users. If a dog relieves themselves on the trail, it is the responsibility of the owner to stop to pick up the excrement with bags that they carry with them. If it is impossible or unsafe for the owner to clean the trail while they are hooked to their dog, they are expected to return after the dog's training is completed to finish cleaning the trail and ensure that there is no trace of excrement remaining. During competitions, participants should respect the organizers' instructions in relation to the behavior to be adopted if the dog relieves themselves on the trail.
- 3.1.4 Dogs wearing yellow bandanas or ribbons are dogs in need of space. These dogs may be reactive in situations of excitement or stress. It is the responsibility of the participant to respect the space of these dogs (see section 4.5.2).
- 3.1.5 The participant must practice respectful communication with other competitors, participants, volunteers, and organizers while engaged in harness dog sports activities and otherwise, including but not limited to: social media, marketing, club discussion boards, and emails.

3.2 Animal protection

- 3.2.1 Abuse of dogs is forbidden.
- 3.2.2 Choke, prong, martingale, and/or e-collars may not be worn during the practice of harness dog sports.
- 3.2.3 The dog must stay in front of the human without being forced while running in harness.

- 3.2.4 A dog demonstrating any signs of contagious illness should not be present or participate during events or training sessions; injured dogs may be present for care but not participate in events.
- 3.2.5 The participant is responsible for the well-being of their dog before, during and after outings. They must respect the principles of animal welfare explained in section 2 of this document.

3.3 Equipment

- 3.3.1 The participant must use adequate equipment for the practice of harness dog sports. Please see below Article 4.1.2. with respect to all Club and Member activities and "RULES FOR PARTICIPANTS" with respect to sanctioned events.

3.4 Discipline

- 3.4.1 In the event that the participant does not respect this Code of Ethics, the Alberta Association of Harness Dog Sports ("AAHDS") has discretion to warn and / or discipline the participant;
- 3.4.2 Discipline for individuals may include but are not limited to: participation limitations, training programs, and revocation of membership;
- 3.4.3 In the event that multiple members of a club do not respect this Code of Ethics, AAHDS has discretion to warn and / or discipline the club;
- 3.4.4 Discipline for Clubs may include but is not limited to: participation limitations, training programs, and revocation of AAHDS affiliation status.

4 ANIMAL WELFARE

4.1 Introduction to Harness Dog Sports

4.1.1 What are Harness Dog Sports

Harness dog sports with small teams are sports performed by human and canine partners who form a team by providing a joint effort in the activity carried out. Sports include canihike, canicross, bikejoring, scooter, rig, kicksled, skijoring, and traditional dog sled. The common factor is that the human and the dog(s) work together and each member of the team makes an effort to advance the team.

4.1.2 Equipment used

It is important to use equipment specially designed and adapted for harness dog sports. Otherwise, the risk of injury increases. Here is the list of recommended equipment to ensure the best possible comfort of the runner as well as the dog when at work:

- A. Body Harness: A harness whose attachment point is usually above the base of the tail. The harness must be properly fitted to the dog to avoid injury and / or discomfort and ensure the dog has adequate freedom of movement. In small dogs, it is possible to use a shorter harness whose attachment point is slightly behind the shoulders. This helps to avoid inadequate tension on the hips while providing more adequate clearance to the hind legs. The harness should be removed immediately after exercising or when the dog is left free, in order to avoid potential accidents.
- B. Bungee line: A bungee line is an elasticized line of attachment which absorbs shock between the human and the dog associated with the pulling of the dog in harness.
- C. Belt suitable for the runner: A belt with sub-thigh straps supported by the pelvis. A good belt should be fixed at the hips and not move while you are running. Pulling should be felt at the pelvis to allow the runner to run efficiently and not slow the dog down, which would cause discomfort for both teammates.
- D. Hands-Free Leash: A hands-free leash may be used as an alternative to a canicross belt and bungee line, however a canicross belt and bungee line are the preferred equipment for the practice of harness dog sports.

4.1.3 Running surface

Running surfaces vary according to the temperature and objectives, but at all times training should prioritize the health of the dog's legs and limit the impact on the joints of the dog. Here is a list of surfaces, from most to least appropriate:

- A. Dirt: The surface is soft, but even, which limits the risk of injury, such as a fracture or dislocation. The soft surface not only prevents excessive wear of the dog's pads, but also preserves the comfort of their joints upon impact.
- B. Packed Sand: In addition to preserving the comfort of the joints and avoiding excessive wear of the pads during harness work, hard-packed sand adds an additional challenge to the dog due to friction and their diminished grip.
- C. Grass: This surface is preferred over more abrasive surfaces, especially in summer when it is very hot, but runners should take care to watch for less visible obstacles such as holes and extremely soft or slippery sections which can cause injury to the dog or runner. This is also an adequate surface to offer a period of rest to the dogs during exercise.
- D. Crusher Dust: This surface may be considered when there is no access to the three previously mentioned surfaces, but it is important to regularly check the condition of the dog's pads while exercising on this surface. Some dogs have legs and paws that are more fragile than others and can therefore be injured more easily on this surface.
- E. Gravel: This surface is more suitable than asphalt for shock absorption on the ground, but sometimes can also be very uncomfortable for the dog's pads.

- F. Asphalt: This surface should be avoided as much as possible when exercising with dogs because of the significant friction it creates and the impact on the dog's joints. The risk of injury to the dog's pads and joints is high. Also, in summer, the temperature of the asphalt is often very high, so the risk of burns to the pads is greater.
- G. Snow Packed Winter: This surface is preferred with a base and suitable depth to secure a snow hook. Free of ice, belly depth snow and holes wherever possible to avoid dog injury.

Note: Keep in mind that the bitumen temperature is always higher than that of the ambient air. Here is a comparative table:

Température air ambiant (degrés celsius)	Température bitume (degrés celsius)
25	52
30	57

At 41 degrees, the skin breaks down in just 60 seconds and at 55 degrees, an egg bakes in 5 minutes. This means that high temperatures will damage a dog's pads in a very short time. To know if the temperature of the asphalt is acceptable for a dog, we can place our hand on it for a few seconds.

4.1.4 Running temperature

Temperature is a serious factor for the practice of harness dog sports. Please refer to Article 7 in the AAHDS Rules & Requirements for Event Organizers with respect to events. The rules take into consideration the majority of participants, but it is important to consider a multitude of other factors that can come into play for the individual dog(s):

- A. Characteristics of the dog: The characteristics of the dog, such as their breed, age and training level will greatly affect their tolerance of different temperatures. A malamute, for example, will have more difficulty running at a temperature of 20 degrees C than a greyhound or a pointer. On the other end of the spectrum, it is important to cover a greyhound at a temperature below -20 degrees C. It is important to consider these factors before taking your dog out on a day of extreme cold or heat. Since animals are less expressive than us, it is important not to overestimate the dog's ability to withstand cold or heat. Both frostbite and heat stroke can happen very quickly and are often only discovered upon return, so it is extremely important to pay attention to your dog's tolerance and comfort level throughout training sessions as temperatures shift.
- B. Type of training: The type of training performed is also important to consider depending on the temperature. A light run or a swim will be more suitable for a temperature above 20 degrees C than a very fast bikejoring training for example.
- C. Other environmental factors: Other important factors to consider include humidex, wind, sun and the difficulty of the course. These are all factors that will affect your dog's ability to compete.

4.1.5 Age of the dog to begin training

- A. Work the mind early. Teach them the commands when they are a few months old.
- B. There are many aspects to harness sport from Canihike to weighted sleds, speed running and everything in between. It is important to provide SAFE guidance to your puppy and not start them doing adult exercise with adult expectations before a minimum age of one year.
- C. Take into consideration the dog's breed (a large breed takes longer to develop physically than a small breed).
- D. Generally, around the age of 6- 8 months you can start low impact harness instruction with the dog, if only to get the dog used to wearing a mushing style harness while moving forward for a few meters. It is recommended you consult with your primary Veterinarian prior to commencing any weight bearing harness training.
- E. Around 12 months a dog can begin to add distance with limited speed or weight of up to 5km at a time if they have built up to this safely and slowly.
- F. It is recommended you consult with your veterinarian prior to beginning any harness sport training.
- G. Always be aware of, and moderate as necessary the effort required from a young dog to pull in harness as the development of their muscle capacity is not yet complete.
- H. Often, while the dog is young, the effects of an injury sustained during training may not be felt immediately, however, this early over-training can have a substantial negative impact on your dog's health in the long run.

The physical and psychological capacity of the dog must be considered and it will, for the majority, come down to the individual dog's characteristics and needs. The load pulled by a young dog should be adapted to his muscular and bone capacities. The breed must be taken into consideration as well as the discipline being practiced. Only primitive type dogs (malamute, husky, and alaskan breeds for example) are genetically predisposed to cover long distances pulling a load, but they have months and years of intensive training (as well as special conditions not limited to nutrition, care, and equipment) before this can be done without compromising their health.

4.2 Preparation of the dog

4.2.1 Dog nutrition and hydration

Regardless of the type of food given (kibble or raw food), it must be considered that a very active dog will have greater nutritional needs.

- A. When intense exercise is planned, it is important to properly hydrate your dog before and after exercise. About two hours before exercise, you can give a "broth" containing a quantity of water

to properly hydrate the dog for exercise and a small amount of food to support him during his effort. It is important to allow time between meals and physical activity to avoid bloat (twisting of the stomach). You have to get to know your dog and detect the signs that might cause discomfort. Each dog is different and it's important to adapt their diet according to their reactions and needs.

- B. After exercise, it is advisable to rehydrate your dog within 15 to 30 minutes. When the dog has returned to a calm state, you can then give him the rest of his meal. The dog must, like humans, rebuild his energy supply once the exercise is over. Although a dog does not sweat, dogs need to drink as much as we do while playing sports - and not just in the summer.
- C. Good hydration is not just before or after exercise, but rather every day. Some dogs, even if you leave them a bowl full of water available at all times, will not drink enough. It must therefore be appetizing. For example, you can add a well-mixed broken egg, a little yogurt, grated cheese or juice from a tuna can, sardine or salmon, etc.. You can also add water directly into the bowl during meals. To know if a dog is well hydrated, we can check the return of the skin of the neck. Just gently pull the skin of the neck up, then release. If the skin returns to its place quickly, then it is a sign that the dog is well hydrated. If it slowly returns to its form, it indicates that the dog is not well hydrated.

4.2.2 Physical preparation of the dog

Getting to know your dog is very important. Everyone wants to compete well and push their team's limits, but without pushing their dog to a point where they exert so much physical effort that it causes injury and / or discomfort to the dog. Just like humans, the dog should undergo a gradual increase in training - both in and out of harness. Everyone wants their dog to give 100%, but not at the expense of their long-term health or physical condition. Concentration, motivation and pleasure are also elements that will lead the dog to their best physical effort. Satisfying the feeling of accomplishment in the dog, thanking them and rewarding them for their good effort are all practices to favor in order to ensure the best team with your dog. Physical preparation is greatly related to the dog's mental preparation. It must be ensured that the dog first and foremost enjoys moving with their human teammate.

4.2.3 Canine Warm up / Stretching

Just like humans, dogs require a warm up to prepare their muscles for physical and cardiovascular exertion. During this period it is important not to exhaust your dog, but to gradually increase the dog's heart rate and warm up their muscles. Once your training session is complete, it is important to bring the dog back into a state of calm (i.e. lower the dog's heart rate to a medium to slow level by allowing the dog to relax in a quiet place). Once the dog has reached the desired level of calm, it is possible to proceed with stretches.¹ This is a great time to praise and congratulate your dog for their good work as well.

¹ We highly recommend seeking out a professional to teach you how best to assist your dog in stretching.

4.2.4 Care and maintenance of the legs

A dog's pleasure in performing an exercise depends largely on how comfortable they are while performing the activity. This mainly involves the paws. It is therefore important to be aware of the condition of the legs of your dog. Nails should be cut properly (not too long or too short). This allows the dog to have a good posture and to be comfortable pulling while also maintaining a good grip. In winter, it is important to consider the hair between the pads, which can contribute to the buildup of ice and snow and consequently be very uncomfortable for the dog. Trimming the hair, applying a paw balm or obtaining lightweight boots that still allow the dog to grip can help them be more comfortable. It is very important to check the condition of the dog's pads after each training session and / or event to make sure they have not suffered any damage to their paws.

4.3 Dog training

The following points are not in themselves a way to train a dog, but a way to respect their well-being in the practice of harness dog sports.

4.3.1 Following and respecting the dog's rhythm

Harness dog sports are above all an opportunity to form a team with your dog. This helps strengthen the bonds that unites you while practicing an activity together. To get there, you have to respect the rhythm of your dog. Each dog is different - be it in their physical capacity, their desire to pull or their confidence in harness. Whatever the training, the human athlete should first make sure that the dog has the physical and mental ability to do so and always respect the pace at which the dog is comfortable.

4.3.2 Progressive training

The dog, like the human, needs progressive training in order to safely do demanding activities, such as long distance or sprint type outings. Before doing this type of training or competition, it is important to ensure that your dog's endurance and training have progressed to the desired goal.

4.3.3 Detecting signs of fatigue and discomfort

The best way to prevent fatigue and discomfort is to pay attention to your dog's signals.² It is important to know your companion when practicing harness dog sports. Some dogs will slow down and decrease the tension on the bungee while other dogs will send more subtle signals. It remains important to know the dog's limits and know when to slow down and stop if you feel the dog needs it. Other examples of a tired dog include but are not limited to: tongue hanging out with an excessive amount of foam, excessive breathing/exhalation and seemingly uncontrollable panting, or dog heading to the side of the trail to lay down.

4.3.4 Dog control

² We recommend you refer to a professional in canine behaviour in order to better understand these signals.

In any type of harness dog sport, it is important to always have control of the situation and to be able to anticipate the reactions of your dog according to the environment and the context in which you will practice the sport (training or competition). Putting the dog in different contexts during training will allow the human to get to know their dog better and thus to react appropriately according to the situation as it arises. The human athlete should be able to encourage a state of calm in the dog and to ensure the safety and well-being of the dog in all circumstances.

4.4 Other spheres of dog development

4.4.1 Other spheres of development & basic needs

Harness dog sports are a good way to promote an active, healthy dog in a manner that allows the dog to better channel their energy. In addition, harness dog sports help strengthen the bonds that unite the dog and the human and improve the communication between the two. However, we must not forget that a dog has other needs to fill to enable him to achieve a social, psychological and physiological balance apart from training in harness.³

4.4.2 Canine Rest Periods

Following a workout, it is important to give the dog a rest period. This can take different forms in order to allow the dog to maximize their recovery period. Training the dog to self-manage is an asset.

4.5 Management of reactive dogs

4.5.1 Best Practices for Good dog management

The following applies to best practices with respect to the management of your dog's reactions to other participants, spectators, canines and other obstacles, persons, or animals during training and / or competitions.

4.5.2 Yellow Dog Project

A yellow bandana or yellow ribbon is an accessory that can be placed on the dog or on the dog's line or leash as a visual notification to others that the dog needs space. This is meant to encourage others to maintain a respectful distance and thereby allows the owner to better manage their dog's environment. This does not mean that the dog is aggressive (though they may be), but simply indicates that for any of a number of reasons the dog requires space from others. These reasons may include but are not limited to: fear, a recent surgery, they are in training, are working or in service, are in heat, or for other reasons specific to the dog or their human counterpart. In general, we recommend providing all dogs in harness with space as they are working and need to remain focused, but explicitly recommend that those wearing yellow accessories be provided with sufficient space that no physical interaction is possible. If you are a spectator, competitor, or volunteer at events, please be mindful of working dogs' need for space to do their job properly and obtain permission to approach.

³ Refer to the Maslow pyramid adapted for the dog.

Dogs posing a risk to other participants (canine and/or human) should be outfitted with a properly fitted basket muzzle and should maintain sufficient distance from other participants and their dogs such that the risk to others is minimized or non-existent.

A properly fitted basket muzzle is an option which allows the dog to breathe properly while running, drink water and accept small treats. Muzzles which do not allow the dog to breathe properly while exercising should not be used. Positive habits with the use of a basket muzzle will help relax all participants and encourage an enjoyable experience for the dog.

The yellow bandana or ribbon is a working tool that must be used with full knowledge of the facts (not everyone around you may know the meaning of the yellow ribbon). In no situation does wearing a yellow bandana or ribbon release the owner from their responsibilities toward others.

For more information, please visit [The Yellow dog project](#).

4.5.3 Dog Defense Mechanisms

Just like humans, defense mechanisms are triggered in dogs when they feel threatened. There are several potential reactions and these are often innate and uncontrollable.

Some will adopt a particular behavior and will tend to repeat the strategy that works the most often to protect themselves. When put in a stressful situation the dog will not necessarily bark, growl or charge the person. In some cases, the dog may try to move away from the individual and charge later if the trigger persists. Conversely, as in the majority of bite cases, the animal will freeze before biting. The individual who misinterprets the signs given by the dog (for example, perceiving a dog who licks the person's hands, arms, etc. as friendly) is also exposing themselves to a bite. Other dogs will jump on the person and scratch them or lick their face excessively.

In addition, it is important to realize that several external factors can increase the likelihood that the dog is having a negative reaction to a stranger (human, canine, or otherwise) such as: yawning and excessive excitement around other dogs, the length of the wait for an event or the owner's return, a difficult trip, and the temperature (especially when there are changes in atmospheric pressure). Thus, a dog known to be very nice and very familiar can also bite. Most reactive dogs do not seek to fight, but rather to get out of a situation that seems difficult.

4.5.4 Management of space and anticipation of circumstances

During harness dog sports events, such as club meetings, training sessions, hikes, or competitions, there are typically many dogs on the site. AAHDS strongly recommends that you leave your dog in a place where they will be comfortable and relaxed when not participating, rather than have them walk with you during such events, regardless of the dog's temperament. The risk of accidents will be greatly reduced and your companion will be happier and more relaxed in a more predictable environment.

4.5.5 On the site of an event or during a club meeting

If you meet a dog with a yellow scarf, it is desirable for you and your canine companion to respect a reasonable distance. On the other hand, the owner of the dog in need of space is responsible for ensuring the safety of their animal and others by controlling the situation. For the welfare of the animal and the safety of others, no dog requiring space should be left accessible and unattended (this includes but is not limited to outdoor wire crates and tie-outs. If these dogs are left in an enclosed space, such as a vehicle or dog box, a sign should be placed in the window or somewhere where it is visible on the vehicle indicating the dog requires space and should not be touched.

We strongly discourage people from letting a dog run freely on an event site. This practice can only lead to clashes and frustrations with other dogs and people. In addition, most event sites and event hosts do not allow the presence of off-leash dogs.

For those who have a fearful or nervous dog during an event, it is best to leave them in the vehicle (weather permitting), in a crate located at a suitable place or to limit their exposure to crowds. Depending on available spots, the place where you park your car may help your dog manage their stress level.

Whether it's a training session on a shared road or a competition, it's always the owner's responsibility to know how to anticipate their dog's reactions.

We invite people to read the AAHDS Rules & Requirements for Participants concerning passing during a competition. At all times, we encourage courteous passing between participants. If you have to pass a team with a reactive dog, it is better to announce yourself in advance and allow the owner to manage the space between you and your team in order to pass without incident. It's the same if you have to pass a team and your dog is reactive.

4.5.6 Animal Welfare

In the case where a dog has a high rate of reactivity during the practice of harness dog sports, we strongly recommend that the owner re-evaluate and respect the dog's ability to manage their emotions. The environment in which you exercise may not be suitable for your dog.

If you own a highly reactive dog, it is exclusively your responsibility during events to ensure you and your dog's well-being, safety and manage your space to limit negative interactions. Events such as competitions generate a lot of stress for dogs and require good self-control. If it's impossible for your dog to control themselves, they are probably not fit to participate in an event yet.

4.5.7 Management of Dogs Tied out, in a vehicle, or in an outside crate

The owner of the dog must be aware that there is always a risk when leaving a dog tied, crated outside, or in a vehicle without supervision. Some dogs, in the absence of their owner, will become very anxious and may react more or less strongly when a stranger approaches. Having no opportunity to flee because they are tied or in an enclosed space, the dog may show aggression to try to repel the intruder and protect themselves. It is important to emphasize that this is a normal defense mechanism and that, regardless of the level of familiarization, the dog may feel assaulted and use his teeth to defend himself.

Many people are tempted to go see unattended dogs to admire or pet them, but it is not always a good idea and permission and / or instruction should always be obtained beforehand. Many dogs do not like to be touched by strangers, even when they are in the presence of their owner, who is a reassuring person.

In short, the safety and well-being of dogs as well as participants and visitors is everyone's responsibility. It is always a good idea to ask someone known to the dog to keep an eye on them if you are unable to watch them for a period of time.

The same is true if you see a stranger or a child approaching a dog that is not in the presence of its owner. As an AAHDS member, it is recommended you warn the person of the risk and attempt to find and advise the owner who left their dog(s) without supervision. Ultimately, a complaint should be filed with the event organizer, the official on duty, or a AAHDS representative if unsafe practices are observed (for example: dogs left alone tied out in a common area).

Otherwise, it is best to leave the dog in your vehicle (weather permitting) where it is safest. You can add a visual barrier like a blanket to the crate or windows to provide privacy to your canine companion. In an extreme case (for example where your dog suffers from separation anxiety or hyper-attachment) leaving them alone may cause them a lot of stress. You should think about establishing a routine to help your dog remain calm in these situations.

4.5.8 AAHDS Member Clubs

Member Clubs must have a Code of Conduct in place which reflects the objective and purpose of the AAHDS Code of Conduct and does not conflict with any of its provisions. Member Clubs may adopt this Code of Conduct as-is or submit their own for review to the AAHDS Board of Directors. It is the responsibility of Member Clubs and organizers to supervise dogs for a better practice of our sports.

4.5.9 Updates to AAHDS Code of Conduct

AAHDS reserves the right to update this Code of Conduct from time to time as may be determined necessary or prudent at the discretion of the AAHDS Board of Directors. Any such updates will be made public a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to their coming into effect and Members may provide comments and/or feedback during this time via the means of communication indicated in said publication.