

# Can you find 10 safety hazards in the **wash rack** below?

By PETE LICHOU with JESSICA HEIN · Photography by JESSICA HEIN



Summertime weather often finds us in the wash rack, scrubbing our Paint Horses until they shine. However, bathing products, water and other factors can compromise your horse's comfort and safety.

Look at the picture below, and find 10 safety hazards that make this wash rack dangerous. Then, turn the page to see if you're right—and learn how you can create a safer situation.



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This wash-rack scenario is an example of good intentions gone wrong. Enjoying the camaraderie of your barnmates is fine, but putting a horse in the middle of that chaos can be catastrophic.

## Safety Hazards

- 1 Dog**  
The dog should have been told to stay out of the wash rack or contained in a dog-safe area of the barn.
- 2 Too Many People**  
A horse can only pay attention to about one or two people at a time. In this case, he's got four people and a dog who are liable to catch his attention. None of the girls are aware of each other—they're only focused on their own tasks and paying little, if any, attention to the horse.
- 3 Horseplay**  
Horseplay—like throwing a wet sponge—has no place around horses, despite its name. If Andrew throws that sponge, the horse could jump forward and hit the cross-ties, which might cause him to move left toward Faith and possibly step into the bucket, making him panic and jump forward or to the right. And with hoses and bottles underfoot, the horse might start kicking—there's no way for Mardi to escape.
- 4 Inappropriate Attire**  
Rachel and Faith are wearing shorts and flip-flops, both of which are inappropriate when
- working around horses. Bare toes can easily be crushed by a horse's hoof, and most open-toe shoes lack traction. Shorts provide no leg protection. Handlers should wear jeans—rolled up if necessary—and waterproof boots while working with horses.
- 5 Inappropriate Water Pressure**  
Faith is spraying her Paint in the face with too much pressure—notice that she's using her thumb as makeshift nozzle. In turn, he's uncomfortable. A nozzle allows you to regulate the water pressure. High pressure can be used to wash a leg or a soiled area, for instance, but washing a horse's face requires a more gentle flow.
- 6 Excess Hose**  
Excess hose underfoot increases the chances of someone stepping on it—interrupting the water flow—or getting tangled in one's feet, like in Rachel's case. If your wash rack is about 14-feet deep, like this one, you only need about five additional feet of hose. A hose between 16 to 20 feet is ideal for that space and allows you to safely work around your horse.
- 7 Cluttered Workspace**  
Long hoses and bathing products—buckets, brushes and shampoo—litter this wash rack, which creates obstacles for the horse and handlers to negotiate. It would be easy to step on one of the overturned bottles and slip, causing the handler to fall and probably spooking the horse.
- 8 Unbalanced Positions**  
The body positions of Rachel and Faith are awkward and unbalanced. They're standing back and reaching to wash the horse—they're doing their best to keep their exposed feet far away from his hooves. They'd have difficulty reacting to a sudden movement by the horse.
- 9 Uneven Crossies**  
One crosstie is too short, and the other is too long. The horse cannot stand square in the center of that wash rack, and that inhibits the handlers. Also missing are panic snaps, which allow you to safely release your horse in an emergency. The horse could step on his dangling lead rope, which would put pressure on his poll and cause him to raise his head or panic. If he did move his head, the lead rope might swing and hit someone.
- 10 Electrical Appliances**  
Some clipping apparently took place before this bath, and the extra lights and clippers are still plugged in. Electricity and water just don't mix.



# Safer Solutions

Creating an environment of comfort is a priority, and it helps your horse understand his role. And remember, more people won't get the job done faster. These two girls are doing a more efficient and proficient job than the previous scenario, when there were three handlers.

Rachel and Faith are working on the same side of the horse, which is a good idea. Their horse can see both girls in one eye, and he doesn't have to monitor a lot of different activities. Rachel is washing his leg with a soft loofah instead of a hard-bristled brush, and her wash bucket is no closer to the horse than she is. The nozzle on the end of an appropriate length of hose allows Faith to regulate water pressure as she washes the tail. Both girls are dressed appropriately and are working in more balanced positions.

The cross ties are adjusted appropriately to allow the horse to stand square in the center of the wash rack, making him

easier and safer to wash. The lead rope has been detached and is hanging up out of the way. If this horse was clipped before his bath, the clippers and lights have been removed after use. There's no excess product lying around—there's no excess anything. They have the tools they need and nothing more.

As a result of conscientious planning to make the bath as comfortable as possible, their Paint is standing quiet, comfortable, calm, attentive and relaxed. **PHC**

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