



***Pour-in materials can mitigate the impact of changing weather on hoof health.***

*by Tab Pigg*

Seasonal weather changes have a major effect on a horse's hoof health. Depending on the time of year, horses' hooves change and may require extra attention and treatment. Neglecting environmental factors can lead to sole deterioration or other harmful consequences. When it comes to a horse's environment, there are two main seasonal factors that impact hoof health: temperature and moisture.



**Temperatures Impact the Hoof Cavity**

Depending on the weather, the speed at which a hoof grows can be affected. A cooler climate causes foot growth to slow down, while warmer temperatures allow for normal sole development. Changes in growth impact a horse's hoof condition. In cooler climates, trimming happens less often because of the slowing in growth. Whereas in warmer climates, the hoof will return to its normal growth speed and will need more consistent trimming and maintenance. It's important that hoof care professionals are consistently monitoring growth to determine how

often hooves should be trimmed or simply maintained. During periods of little-to-no growth, it's also vital to make sure that the hooves aren't wearing away. Extra support inside the hoof cavity can alleviate pressure from the hoof wall to mitigate any wear that may occur.

Pour-in pad materials adhere to the bottom of the feet and can be used throughout any time of the year. Both Equi-Pak and Equi-Pak Soft provide extra protection and support as temperatures change, and also bond to the sole eliminating the need to pick out the feet daily. These fast-setting materials can be injected under a pad or used as stand-alone pads.

### **Wet and Dry Conditions**

The amount of moisture within the ground is one of the most important environmental factors to consider for hoof health. Wet conditions increase the chance of infection because of the increase of moisture. Throughout spring, some parts of the country are still getting rain and a wet environment can cause thrush to run rampant through the barn.

Thrush is a bacterial infection that lives in the soft tissue of the frog, and can cause irritation in a horse's foot. Similar to athlete's foot in humans, thrush is not life-threatening, but can lead to serious hoof issues if left untreated.

Like a sponge, the foot of a horse can also become soft and saturated when the ground is wet. In these conditions, the feet often expand and become softer, so it's important that a hoof care professional is monitoring the hooves to assure that horse shoes fit correctly or that the feet are being cleaned out regularly.

To avoid infection or injury, horse owners can use pour-in pad materials to help maintain optimal sole health. Vettec's Equi-Pak CS will bond to the bottom of a horse's foot, sealing out moisture and preventing debris from being packed in the foot. Equi-Pak CS is a fast-setting soft instant pad material, and is infused with copper sulfate to effectively manage mild and moderate cases of thrush.

Another situation to consider is when a horse goes from wet to dry conditions in a short amount of time, which is likely in some areas as winter turns to spring. This can cause chipping and

Written by Tab Pigg  
Friday, 28 April 2017 20:17

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cracking, as well as a change in shoe size. The feet shrink as they dry out, so if a horse is shod, the shoes become too big.

It's critical that a farrier examines the hooves when this change occurs so that the horse has proper support, and to mitigate the possibility of abscesses due to cracking and chipping that may occur when the sole dries out. When horseshoes don't fit correctly, horses distribute their weight unevenly, and land on their feet differently. If they put excessive force and stress on one area of the hoof wall, it can cause a vertical crack, otherwise known as a quarter crack. Often times, a horse is in pain when it has quarter crack, and it can become lame if the condition is not treated. If a horse is diagnosed with quarter crack, it's important to apply support to its hooves. Pour-in pads are an ideal solution to provide extra support during seasonal transitions.

Vettec Equi-Pak works well for this issue to support the internal hoof cavity. It absorbs shock and concussion to alleviate pressure from the hoof wall. Sole-Guard is beneficial and serves as a firmer pad material that distributes a horse's weight across the entire hoof-bottom. It also allows for faster sole growth. In situations where a horse needs to relieve pressure around a quarter crack, this material is key to providing the horse relief, especially in the changing seasons.

Although moderately warm and dry weather is ideal for horses, it is more common that horse owners will have to deal with a variety of climates. The temperature and moisture content both directly impact the anatomy and health of hooves. To maintain a horse's overall health, it is important for horse owners to offer extra attention to soles throughout the changing seasons.

Talk with your farrier or veterinarian about your horse's environment, and how pour-in pad materials can be a helpful tool for soles during a variety of environmental conditions.

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