

October 2, 2024

REPORT: Evidence for a Calgary Stampede Without Rodeo and Chuckwagon Events

Key Points

- The use of animals in rodeo events presents a significant risk of injury and death, as evidenced by the [near-annual animal fatalities at the Calgary stampede rodeo and chuckwagon races](#).
- The 2024 Calgary stampede rodeo and chuckwagon races were the deadliest since 2019, with [four animal fatalities during this year's 10-day event](#).
- **Three horses sustained serious and irrecoverable injuries** during the chuckwagon races and one **steer's neck was disturbingly snapped** during a wrestling event. All four animals were euthanized.
- [Footage](#) from the Calgary Stampede rodeo captures animals being **roughly handled and displaying visible signs of stress**, including thrashing in the chutes, resisting handlers, open mouth and extended tongue, and exhibiting eye white response.
- [2024 Research Co. public polling](#) shows that **majority of Calgarians oppose calf roping, steer wrestling, bronc, riding, and chuckwagon racing**.
- Public polling also shows that **67% of Calgarians oppose government funding of rodeo events**.
- [2022 Research Co. polling](#) of Calgarians also found that **removal of the rodeo and chuckwagon events would have virtually no impact on attendance rates** and would bring a new crowd to the Calgary stampede.

Therefore, the VHS recommends that Calgary city council seek the removal of the rodeo and chuckwagon events from the annual Calgary Stampede program.

Introduction

The Vancouver Humane Society (VHS) is a registered charity dedicated to the humane treatment of animals. The VHS's advocacy efforts are local, regional and national in scope. The VHS began tracking animal fatalities at the Calgary Stampede in 1986. The organization and other leading animal protection groups across Canada and internationally have identified the use of animals in high-stress and high-risk rodeo events as an animal welfare issue.

Animal welfare issues

There are a number of animal welfare issues associated with the use of animals in rodeo events. Below is a summary of the main concerns and supporting evidence.

Risk of injury and death:

Rodeos involve fast-paced, timed events, which put animals at risk of serious injury, such as broken bones, neck injuries or internal damage, and may require euthanasia.

In calf roping, there is a [risk of injury](#) due to lassoing the calf around the neck; bringing them to an abrupt stop from a high speed; throwing them to the ground; tying their legs; and the continued tension on the lasso by the roping horse. This can result in neck injuries, bruising and inflammation, winding from trachea pressure, and musculoskeletal injuries.

Research also shows that bucking bulls are more prone to [horn and sinus issues](#) than non-bucking bulls. This may be due to a higher risk of head and horn trauma for bucking bulls and because of a practice known as 'horn tipping', which can lead to horn and sinus infections. Horn tipping involves blunting the end of a bull's horns, usually by saw, in order to protect the rider from injury. Research also found bucking bulls were more likely to experience a [musculoskeletal disorder of their spine](#).

In steer wrestling, the animal is likely to experience [pain and bruising](#) from having their neck twisted and from the throwing action used to bring the steer to the ground.

Calgary Stampede animal event fatalities

Since the VHS began tracking animal fatalities in 1986, [at least 109 animals have died](#) at the Calgary Stampede. These figures are not made readily-available by Stampede officials, but are instead based on injuries and fatalities witnessed at the Stampede or from media inquiries with Stampede officials. Fatalities on this scale in any other sport would lead to significant changes, but disturbing fatalities have continued to occur at the Stampede rodeo and chuckwagon events for **nearly 40 years**.

Injuries may not always be identified immediately after an event, as [inflammation and muscle damage](#) can take up to 48 hours after the injury to present. Together, these factors mean the number of animal injuries and fatalities associated with the Calgary Stampede rodeo and chuckwagon races may be much higher. This reality represents a serious lack of transparency surrounding the reporting of animal injuries and fatalities.

The 2024 Calgary Stampede rodeo and chuckwagon races were the deadliest since 2019, with [four animal fatalities this year](#). This includes three horses, who sustained serious injuries during the chuckwagon races, and a steer, whose neck was snapped during a steer wrestling event.

Despite rule changes and attempts to make events safer, statistics show that [fatalities continue to be a near-annual occurrence](#) in animal events at the Calgary Stampede. This reflects the inherently dangerous and deadly nature of the rodeo and chuckwagon races.

Inhumane tools and practices:

Rodeo events rely on the use of fear, pain, and stress to make animals "perform" for public entertainment. Animals used in rodeo events are prey animals and the tools and handling practices utilized in these events take advantage of the animal's "fight, flight or freeze" fear response to incite fleeing and bucking. This includes animals being deliberately agitated by handlers prior to being released into the arena; animals being separated and isolated from their

herd; animals being chased by a rider on horseback; and the use of painful mouth bits, flank straps/ropes, and spurs.

Rough handling

[Footage](#) from numerous rodeo events, including at the Calgary Stampede, show animals being roughly handled while confined in chutes alongside the rodeo arena. Common examples of this include handlers hitting, pushing, punching and kicking animals in the chute, as well as tail and ear twisting and pulling.

In roping and wrestling events, once the animal is released from the chute, they are chased by a rider on horseback, roughly roped or wrestled to the ground.

Flank strap/rope

In bucking events, the purpose of a flank strap/rope is to cause discomfort and stress that triggers the animal's fear response to buck. Prior to being released into the arena, the flank strap/rope is tightened around the animal's sensitive underbelly.

Spurs

In bucking events, spurs are worn on the rider's boots and used to grip onto the animal and maintain control, while also causing discomfort that leads to bucking. In bucking events, points are awarded to the rider based on their performance and spurring action. In bareback riding, spurs are swept along the horse's neck. In saddle bronc riding, the spurs are placed high on the horse's neck and dragged toward the back of the saddle. In bull riding, higher scores are awarded for kicking the bull with spurs.

Signs of stress:

Visible signs of stress commonly seen in animals used in rodeos include: widening of the eyes to expose more of the white of the eye (eye white response); signs of urination and defecation; excessive drooling; open mouth and extended tongues; vocalization and resisting handlers.

Research on [stress hormones](#) and [behavioural evidence](#) also show that calves experience acute stress during all stages of roping events, including when chased, roped, lifted and thrown to the ground, legs tied, and released.

Growing public opposition

Public polling in recent years reflects growing public concern around the use of animals in rodeo events in line with the scientific evidence of the harm it causes.

A [2022 Research Co. poll](#) of Calgarians found that removal of the rodeo and chuckwagon events would have virtually no impact on attendance rates and would bring in new crowds to the Calgary Stampede.

Another [2022 Research Co. poll](#) found 61% of Canadians and 49% of Albertans opposed the use of animals in rodeo.

A [2023 Research Co. poll](#) found growing opposition, with 67% of Canadians and 53% of Albertans opposed the use of animals in rodeo.

[Research Co. polling in February and July of 2024](#) looked at public opinion surrounding specific rodeo events. The polling results found that a growing majority of Albertans disagree with the use of animals in all five rodeo events surveyed. This includes calf roping, steer wrestling, bull riding, bronc riding and chuckwagon racing.

Amongst Calgarians, four of the five events were opposed by a majority of residents in the July poll, compared to just one event in February. More than half of those polled in Calgary oppose calf roping, steer wrestling, bronc riding, and chuckwagon racing.

The February and July 2024 polling also looked at public opinion regarding government funding being provided to rodeo events. The polling results indicate that a growing majority across Canada, including in Alberta, oppose government funding of rodeo events. **Amongst Calgarians, opposition rose significantly, from 51% opposed in February to 67% in July.**

Recommendations

Given the issues and evidence outlined in this report, it is the VHS's recommendation that Calgary city council seek the removal of the rodeo and chuckwagon events from the annual Calgary Stampede program.

This may be accomplished by working with the city's partners and organizers at the Calgary Stampede to voluntarily remove these specific events or by enacting a municipal bylaw to prohibit the activities from taking place within the municipality.

There is precedent to support the city in taking this action. A growing number of jurisdictions have prohibited rodeo events, tools and activities, including Britain, much of Europe, and parts of the U.S. and Australia. More locally, rodeo bans exist in the cities of Vancouver, Port Moody, and the District of North Vancouver.

Many communities have moved away from rodeos and instead host other events that can bring together residents and tourists without putting animals in harm's way. Similarly, the Calgary Stampede has evolved over its history to incorporate other attractions, including a large art festival; indigenous performers and artists at the Elbow River Camp; the Midway rides and games; and live music featuring today's top bands and local musicians.

As partners of the Calgary Stampede, Calgary City Council is uniquely positioned to help Stampede organizers and leadership bring the Stampede into alignment with public values by removing these increasingly controversial events and instead focusing on the many other popular activities and attractions that bring people together.