



## **How to handle helmets that are not properly secured**

DR120.1.1 defines protective headgear and states that *“anyone mounted on a horse at any time on the competition grounds, including non-competing riders, riders on non-competing horses, mounted participants in exhibition classes, and those competing in all classes and tests, including Para Dressage tests, must wear protective headgear as defined by this rule and otherwise in compliance with GR801. The harness must be secured and properly fitted. Any rider violating this rule at any time must immediately be prohibited from further riding until the headgear is properly in place.”* This rule goes on to add that protective headgear may be the same as or a coordinating color with the coat, and may include contrast coloring, accent, and crystal decoration.

What is “improperly” fitted headgear? If a helmet is moving around or falling down over the eyes it is improperly fitted. Importantly, it is improperly secured if the chinstrap of the harness is hanging down with clear “daylight” between the strap and the chin. A properly fitted harness must not be able to slide forward around the chin. A rule of thumb is not more than two fingers fit between skin and harness below the chin. If the harness becomes unfastened during the test, stop the rider immediately. Unless the snap is broken, reattachment is not difficult. If the fastener is broken, eliminate the rider and have them dismount to exit.

It is the competitor’s responsibility to enter the ring with the helmet properly fitted and secured. While the judge’s responsibility to enforce this rule is exclusively when the rider is inside the competition ring, it helps when a judge happens to notice an improperly secured helmet before the rider enters the ring. In this case, the rider can adjust the helmet himself or get help from another individual. The helmet can only be removed for adjustment if the rider dismounts. No exceptions! If the bell has rung, this can often be accomplished quickly and the rider can get into the ring before exceeding the 45 second limit for entry.

However, once the rider is inside the ring, the options are limited. It is essential that judges handle the improperly-secured helmet issue so that they are not violating any other rules in the process - including those in DR122. Sometimes, it is hard to determine that the helmet is loose until the rider is near to the judge -- and occasionally an improperly adjusted helmet starts to get loose during the test. Once the judge determines the harness is loose, he/she must IMMEDIATELY signal for the rider to stop and tell him the helmet is loose. If the rider can quickly make the adjustment with no outside help, without dismounting, the test can continue with a possible penalty being the effect of the interruption on the movement. The judge must make a notation of the incident on the test.

If the test delay exceeds 20 seconds, it is reasonable for the judge to eliminate as he would for resistance. (DR122.7.1). If the helmet falls off while the rider is inside the ring or if the rider dismounts before the test is concluded, the judge must eliminate. The judge (or anyone else) cannot give unauthorized assistance. (DR122.10). In no case may the rider continue after losing their helmet altogether.

Judges should keep in mind that this headgear rule for dressage has been in effect for almost ten years and judges have been responsible for enforcing headgear rules inside the competition ring since the rule’s inception. Judges only had the option of not eliminating for certain other kinds of dress.

If judges have a question on any rules, including headgear, they should consult the show’s Technical Delegate (and take a photo if appropriate), or if before a show, contact the USEF Dressage Department. Finally, judges should remember that helmet enforcement is not much different from any other rules that require judges to enforce them inside the competition ring – except that this one is a serious safety issue that cannot be ignored! An elimination for a helmet problem will strongly encourage the rider to fix the problem!