



The Australian Carriage Driving Society Inc.

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Helmet Standards information

There has been some feedback recently that members seeking to buy a replacement equestrian helmet have experienced some confusion and misinformation regarding helmet standards. The below is a summary of recently updated information on this matter, some of which was posted on the ACDS Facebook page in recent days in response to member's questions:

Where did the ACDS By-Law come from?

ACDS Federal Council adopted the revised By-Law 13.12 in March 2016 (as previously published and available from the ACDS Website).

The revision was necessary because the European Standard for Equestrian Helmets (EN1384) had been superseded and acceptance of these helmets was being phased out by equestrian organisations in Australia.

By-Law 13.12 Effective 4th March 2016 where helmets are worn at ACDS activities they must comply with at least one of the following codes and it's proviso(s):

British – PAS 015: 1998 or 2011, VG1 01.040: 2014-12 – provided they are BSI Kitemarked

European – VGI 01.040 2014-12 - provided they are BSI Kitemarked

American – ASTM F1163: 2004a or 04a onwards provided they are SEI marked SNELL E2001

Australian or New Zealand – AS/NZS 3838 2006 onwards and provided they are SAI Global marked

Helmet Standard EN1384 will remain in place until 31st December 2016. As of 1st January 2017 helmets which are certified to EN 1384 only, will not be accepted for use at ACDS activities.

The wording adopted was recommended by HorseSafety Australia, who are the industry advisory body, and includes references to 'marks' which if present, confirm that helmets are indeed certified to the respective standard (eg "SAI Global marked" or "BSI Kitemarked").

The inclusion of this wording was aimed at ensuring Members get the best possible product for their money and to limit the potential for inadvertent purchase of a possibly sub-standard or non-compliant helmet, as unfortunately there is the possibility for these to be on the market.

How do helmet standards work?

In order to sell helmets in most countries manufacturers will need to demonstrate that their helmet is designed in accordance with one (or more) of the recognised UK / Euro, US or AS/NZ Standards (there are other national standards but these are often not recognised outside of their home country). To do this samples will be manufactured and subjected to independent destructive testing to verify that the design meets the standard. If the testing is successful, the relevant Standards Authority (typically this design testing has been done in Germany) will then 'certify' the design.

Manufacturers will in many cases then conduct their production operations in a different country with lower production costs from where the design certification was obtained.

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What are 'Kitemarks' and what do they indicate?

Manufacturers can choose to have their design and manufacturing processes independently certified by one of the recognised Standards Authorities – in Australia it is SAI Global, in the USA it is SEI or SNELL, and in the UK it is BSI (again there are others, but these are the most highly regarded globally).



BSI Kitemark



SEI Kitemark



SAI Global StandardsMark

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To achieve this certification, the manufacturer must meet strict requirements in terms of production quality control, testing and compliance, and provide samples on request for testing.

The manufacturer is then legally allowed to display the relevant Quality Mark on their product (it may be on the helmet itself or on the sales tag attached). This process is expensive so not all manufacturers bother, but for those that do it is a significant marketing advantage because Standards Certification is the only means by which consumers can have confidence that the product they are buying does actually meet the requirements of the standard in terms of both design and manufacturing quality.

Australian Standard AS/NZS3838 & US Standard ASTM F1163 require this independent certification as part of achieving compliance with the relevant Standard.

These Standards, along with any helmet manufactured under a European Standard and certified by BSI, require batch testing (samples are again destructively tested) during the manufacturing process and prior to release to the market, in order to verify that the helmet continues to meet the standards certification.

European Standard EN1384 was superseded by VGI 01.040 2014-12 (often referred to as 'VG1'), in part because of concerns about the quality of product being certified under the EN1384 Standard.

The new VG1 Standard is apparently not significantly different in terms of design requirements from EN1384 and it appears does not necessarily require batch testing, so unless a manufacturer chooses to seek BSI Certification (referred to as 'Kitemarking') the helmet may not have the same level of production quality control, and the consumer has no means of independently verifying the quality of the product.

All of the helmet standards vary somewhat in the types of tests they require, so it is not possible to directly compare one standard to another and say which is 'best', however any helmet with a quality mark can be viewed as safer than a helmet to the same standard without the quality mark, as without it, no further testing is carried out after the helmet passes the initial test to the standard¹.

¹ www.beta-uk.org.au British Equestrian Trade Association

What are the issues now?

The present issues only relate to helmets being sold as 'complying with Standard VG1'.

Helmets certified to AS/NZS3838 and ASTM F1163 have the relevant Standards Marks, and undergo batch testing as part of the certification.

There appear to be a number of factors which are contributing to the confusion and difficulty being experienced at present in purchasing VG1 helmets which comply with the ACDS By-Law 13.12:

- It seems some retailers are possibly not aware of, or are not explaining adequately, the terminology related to the respective standards, and particularly the relevance of Standards Marks and what they mean in terms of product quality.
- Some other Australian equestrian organisations have adopted differing requirements to the ACDS, choosing not to require BSI Kitemarked VG1 helmets, but simply accepting helmets which meet the VG1 Standard (these may or may not have been subject to batch testing).
- There appears to be only a limited number BSI Kitemarked VG1 helmet styles available on the Australian market at this point in time, and not from all retailers.

Without the BSI Kitemarking component, the same issues which existed with the manufacture of EN1384 helmets will most likely continue with those under the new VG1 Standard, and unfortunately with this component not being adopted uniformly across the Australian equine industry, a market is created for helmets which do not meet the higher quality requirements of other Standards.

I need to replace my EN1384 helmet – what should I do now?

The recommendation is to buy the best quality helmet you can afford – those certified to AS/NZS3838:2006, ASTM F1163:2004a or PAS015:1998/2011 come with the confidence of higher standards of manufacturing quality control, as does a helmet certified to VGI 01.040 2014-12 with BSI Kitemarking.

A helmet marketed as complying with VGI 01.040 2014-12 but with no independent quality certification may, or may not, have the same level of quality control.

Shop around, discuss with your retailer and do not accept being told things like “this one [non-certified] is just as good” because that is simply not accurate – it is likely there has not been anywhere near the same investment in quality control as those that have achieved full standards certification.

If you have recently purchased a VG1 helmet believing it to be compliant but now feel that it may not be (i.e. no BSI Kitemark), you may decide to talk to your retailer about an exchange or refund.

What actions will be taken from here?

Personally I am reluctant to see the ACDS disregard the recommendation from the Industry Advisory body, or see the issues which occurred with EN1384 helmets continue under the VG1 standard, however the difficulty in sourcing VG1 Standard BSI Kitemarked helmets is recognised, as too is the illogical situation created by differing requirements between equestrian organisations.

Therefore ACDS Federal Council will be asked to review the BSI Kitemarking requirement for VG1 helmets in light of the changing circumstances outlined above.

Members will be advised of the outcome as soon as practicable.

Brendan Dwyer

ACDS Federal President