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Disaster Preparedness for Horses

Make equine emergencies easier to handle with the three Ps: plan, prepare and prevent.



Learn how to protect your horses *and* your barn. *Journal* photo.
By Farnam

It's not something any horse owner wants to think about, but **disaster planning** takes forethought for horses due to their size and **transportation needs**. Catastrophes can happen anywhere and can take different forms — from the most common **barn fires** to **hurricanes**, floods and **wildfires**. During any emergency, the time you may have to evacuate will be limited. It is vital for all horse owners **to plan, prepare and prevent**.

Barn Fires Unfortunately, barn fires happen with some regularity and are the leading disaster for horse owners. Barn fires spread swiftly, leaving little time to forge an escape.

Following are tips for horse owners:

Plan

1. Develop an evacuation plan and make sure all employees and horse handlers are familiar with it.

An important part of **fire prevention** is working with your local fire department. Offer the local fire department a tour of your facility or property and ask fire fighters for suggestions or improvements for fire protection.

2. Install a properly pressurized sprinkler system.

3. Install a fire detection system that can be heard from inside the house or one that directly connects to 911 emergency operators.

4. Add lightning rods to the barn.

5. If you live in a wildlife area make sure you have a 50-foot firebreak (a strip of plowed or cleared land to stop a fire from spreading) around the barn.

6. Be aware that horses tend to run back into burning barns out of fear and confusion, as it is their safe zone.

7. Familiarize your horse with emergency procedures and try to **desensitize** him to flashing lights.

Prepare

1. Keep aisles, stall doors and barn doors free of debris and equipment.

2. Mount fire extinguishers at each entrance and around the stable.

3. Prepare a basic **first-aid kit** that is portable and easily accessible.

4. Make arrangements with a friend or another horse owner to stable your horses if needed.

5. Make sure that the horses' halters and lead ropes are easily accessible, preferably hanging on each horses' stall.

Prevent

1. Prohibit smoking in or around the barn. A discarded cigarette can ignite hay in seconds.

2. Inspect electrical systems regularly.

3. Keep the barn clean and free of dust, cobwebs, trash, oily tack or hoof cleaning rags, and soiled paper towels.

4. Do not store bedding materials or hay in the horse barn.

5. After a fire, be sure to have all horses checked by a veterinarian. Do not

assume that just because the horse looks OK after a fire, that no damage has been done. **Smoke inhalation** can cause serious lung damage and respiratory complications. Horses are prone to stress and may experience colic after a fire.

Hurricanes, Floods and Wildfires An imminent hurricane, flood or wildfire creates two major upheavals for horse owners: mandated evacuation and immediate post-disaster property damage to barns, as well as power loss and unsafe road conditions prohibiting travel for food and/or medical supplies. Here are some tips:

1. Make sure to create detailed evacuation plans and design escape routes for yourself and your horses. Discuss your escape plans with your veterinarian.

2. Leave 48 hours before the storm or fire arrives so you and your trailered horse are not stuck in traffic.

3. Be aware that horse **trailers** get thrown around in high winds. It is recommended not to trailer a horse after winds reach tropical storm force (40 mph).

Preparation for All Scenarios

1. Maintain horses' **encephalitis** vaccinations every 6 months.

2. Always have proper animal identification that's updated and easily accessible, including:

- Pictures
- Brands or tattoos
- Microchip ID
- Fetlock ID bands

3. Create an emergency barn kit that includes:

- Waterproof trunk
- Thermometer
- Bandages, scissors and gauze
- Ointment
- Radio, flashlight and extra batteries
- Poultice
- Electrolytes
- Flyspray (look for Farnam's selection of fly sprays)
- Halter and shank
- Iodine, Furicin, peroxide and petroleum jelly
- Two-week supply of prescription medications
- Supply of dewormers (look for Farnam's effective dewormer selection)
- Keep a one-week supply of water and feed on hand in the event of post-disaster inaccessibility.