

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS & EMERGENCY CARE FOR HORSES

Have you thought about or planned on what to do with your horse during a natural or man-made disaster? We are all guilty of not being prepared to meet our pets' needs during a disaster. Horses rely on humans for food and water on a daily basis and shelter to protect them from the elements. Horses aren't the free running breed they use to be; we confine them in smaller pastures, corrals and paddocks more so now than in days past. If a fire or flash flood were to occur, fencing is a horse's biggest dilemma. To a horse flight is the only way to save its life. This is one of the reasons we need to be prepared.

When should a person evacuate their horse?

The same general rule applies to all your animals. You need to ask yourself "is this situation safe enough to leave a child behind"? If the answer is no, do not leave your horse unless you have no other option. Move your animals early! It is difficult to evacuate large animals and it will take some time especially if you have more than one. Do not wait till the last minute! Remember, horses can sense when you are stressed, so try to remain calm.

How should I evacuate my horse?

You will need a railer to safely evacuate your horse. If you do not have one, check with your neighbors to see if they have room in their trailer for your horse(s) in a disaster. The Napa Valley Horseman's Association has started a list of members with trailers who are willing to assist during a disaster. Don't put off doing this, it may mean your horses' life. When you have a trailer arrangement, you should stock it with basic first aid items, fresh food and at least five gallons of water.

What if my horse has never been in a trailer?

If your horse is not accustomed to being in a trailer, you need to practice both day and night, use a flashlight at night. Remember horses are herd animals, so wherever the lead horse goes, the others will follow. This can be helpful during a disaster, if you have more than one horse.

What should I be concerned about for my horse, during an EARTHQUAKE?

Generally horses are not affected by earthquakes, unless a barn or other building falls down, traps or injures them. During the Northridge earthquake in January 1994, the biggest problem for horses was dehydration. In some areas the water remained off for as long as two weeks.

After an EARTHQUAKE:

- You should check the stability of the barn, fence posts and fencing.
- Remove any fallen objects.
- Check for any damaged electrical wiring.
- Check for any gas ruptures or leaks, also.

What about a FIRE?

If for some reason you need to leave your horse behind in a fire, you must remove the horse from the barn and close all the barn doors. Horses, once frightened, will seek out a safe place, for most it will be the barn. Even if it is on fire, they will run back in it, so close all barn doors.

What about evacuating during a FIRE?

- Blindfold your horse with a wet towel tucked under the halter, cover both eyes. Practice blindfolding your horse so it becomes accustomed to it.
- Nylon halters can melt during a fire, so leather are the best to use. You may want to place a wet bandanna over your horses' nostrils. Smoke inhalation can cause pneumonia, which can kill your horse.
- Wet your horse's mane and tail. Do not put a blanket on your horse, they can easily catch fire.
- Once you get your horse to safety, offer water immediately, dehydration can come on quickly.
- If your barn is on fire and your horse is in it, you need to evaluate the danger to yourself, before going in. Just because you open the barn door, does not mean your horse is going to come right out. You will most likely have to go in and get it.
- A little Vicks ointment in a horse's nostrils can reduce the ability to smell the smoke.
- Before you leave your property turn off your gas and electricity.

After a FIRE:

- Remove any burned wood.
- Disassemble what remains of burned barn or stalls.
- Remove any and all debris from ground, especially nails.
- Any metal fencing needs to be wiped down. Heat causes the galvanizing to come to the surface, leaving a yellow residue that is toxic, if your horse licks it.
- Turn over the soil in pastures that have burned, looking for hot embers. Bury as much ash as possible.
- Get rid of any food covered with ash.
- Check for any damaged electrical wiring and gas ruptures and leaks.

What about FLOODS?

If you must leave your horse behind in a flood, once again remove the horse from the barn, and close all barn doors. Horses are good swimmers, but stuck in a barn or building, they will drown. The most dangerous thing to your horse during a flood is mud. Horses can get stuck in it and panic and injure themselves. Another concern would be fencing, especially in swift moving water. If you pasture your horse, leave an extra key with a neighbor or friend that can move your horse, if a disaster occurs when you are not around. As with any disaster, be prepared if your horse is in a low lying area or has a stream or creek running near by. You should have evacuation plans arranged. Once a flood watch or warning goes into affect, you should plan to go ahead and evacuate your horse to a safe area.

After a FLOOD:

- You should look for poisonous snakes that may have gotten trapped inside barns or stalls.
- Remove any debris.
- Remove any mud, standing in mud for prolonged periods of time, can cause foot problems.
- Check that all fencing and post are standing and secure.
- Get rid of any feed or hay that got wet. Moldy food can make a horse sick.
- Empty any water containers, in case contaminated water collected in them during the flood.
- Check any wooded floors for weaknesses caused by water damage.
- Check for any damaged electrical wires.
- Check water piped into the barn, to determine if it is safe to drink.
- Do not light any matches in or around the barn, until you have determined that there are no flammable liquids on the ground, brought there by floodwater.

TEMPORARY HOUSING

- Port-a-stalls or livestock panels can be used for temporary stalls.
- Picket lines are made by first securing a rope between two poles or trees above the horses' heads and then tying the horse to the picket line with a lead rope and a quick release knot. Use 100 lb. Cotton or nylon test rope. Give each horse no more than three feet of rope, or else they may get their foot over it and get tangled. The horse should be able to comfortably move its head up and down and back and forth.
- When tying a horse out do not attach a lead rope to a bridle. Instead, you should always attach the lead rope to a halter.
- Horses can be tied to a sturdy fence, but be sure if tying more than one horse, that they are kept at least a horse length from each other to prevent them from kicking one another.
- Never stake a horse to something that is ground level.
- Canopy tents, trees, or tarps can be used to provide your horse with shelter from the sun or rain.
- Have fly spray and wipes in your disaster kit to relieve the horse of these pests.
- It is important to make your horse feel safe, so that it will calm down, reducing the risks of it hurting itself, another horse, you or someone else.
- Check with local fairgrounds, horse show arenas, or racetracks in your area to see if they are willing to provide temporary housing, during a disaster.
- If your horse is not used to being kept in a stall, be sure to start getting him accustomed to it now. During a disaster, this may be the only way to keep your horse securely restrained.