Be Prepared for Natural Disasters
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Whether you are responsible for a barn full of horses or one beloved companion, this summer's harsh weather reminds us to be prepared when disaster strikes. Horse owners know that it is more complicated to evacuate a 1,500-pound Quarter Horse than a 15-pound Bichon Frise, but a little advance preparation will put your mind at ease and allow you to evacuate with your horses to safety if necessary. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) offers some guidelines to use in developing a plan that will meet your individual needs.

Know the potential hazards that might threaten your horses:

- Hurricanes are not likely to affect horse owners in the Midwest; however, those in the Gulf Coast region must monitor development of potential hurricanes.
- Brush fires are common in certain regions of the country. Is your area at risk?
- Do you live near a chemical plant or railroad track, which might have the potential for a hazardous material spill or release?
- Is your facility located in or near a flood plane?
- Are there fire hazards on your farm or in your barn that you can remedy (i.e., through hay storage, proper electrical wiring, and fire extinguisher placement)?

Maintain identification records for each of your horses:

- Consider permanent identification such as a tattoo, microchip, or brand, and document unusual markings or scars.
- Keep current photographs of yourself with each horse for ownership verification in the event you are separated from your animals.
- In the face of an evacuation, employ additional temporary identification tactics. Consider writing your cell phone number and a contact outside your immediate area on a luggage tag and braiding it into your horse's mane or attaching it to his halter, or try using a livestock marking pen to write phone numbers and contacts directly on your horse.
- Have a halter and lead rope for each horse.
For safety reasons, many people do not leave a halter on a horse when in the stall or turned out. Ensure equipment is readily available in the event you need to move the horse out fast (e.g., during a barn fire).

Work with your horse so he's easy to catch and halter, and ensure he is properly trained to lead.

Keep in mind that horses are known to seek safety in their stalls and might try to run back into a burning barn.

Consider transportation options and routes:

- Do you own your own trailer, or will you need to rely on another person for a trailer? Make these plans ahead of time to ensure your horses are evacuated in a timely manner.
- Do your horses load in a trailer?
- Do you have enough trucks and trailer space to evacuate your farm quickly? If not, have a plan in place to access additional trailers.
- Identify a location for evacuation, preferably 60-90 miles away at a friend or colleague's farm.
- Form a network of farms and horse owners that can be contacted in the event of an emergency. Most disasters occur locally, in a defined region. If a tornado hits one part of a state, what farms are located outside of the affected area that might be willing to assist in caring for displaced animals?

Regarding potential horse friendly evacuation sites, consider:

- Horse show facilities
- Equine veterinary clinics
- Veterinary medical colleges
- Stock yards or auction facilities
- Other horse boarding or breeding operations

Develop a list of contact numbers. Maintain the list with your horse's photo, identification information, and records (e.g., Coggins test, registration papers, microchip information, vaccination and medical records). Include:

- Your contact phone numbers and an e-mail address. As a backup contact include the phone number of a relative or friend who lives outside of your immediate area in case local phone service is disrupted.
- The phone number for your predetermined evacuation site
- Local contact person who can be reached in the case of an emergency if you are not available.
- Your veterinarian's name, clinic name, and phone numbers.
- Identify an alternate veterinarian located 30-90 miles away.
• State veterinarian number, state and local veterinary medical associations, and county extension office to obtain the location of any emergency temporary shelters.
• Hotel phone numbers
• Local police and fire department information
• Horse transporters
• Feed distributors/hay suppliers
• Equestrian facilities in your state

Use these guidelines to create a basic plan, then practice the plan and make changes accordingly. Preparing for a disaster should be part of routine horse care. Knowing what your horse needs and working these specific needs into your disaster plan before an emergency evacuation or disaster strikes will provide peace of mind when the unexpected happens.

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