

DISASTER PLANNING FOR HORSES

Why Horse Owners Need to be Prepared



Disaster preparedness is important for all animals, but it takes extra consideration for horses because of their size and the requirements for transporting them. If you think that disasters can't happen in Vermont, you may be tragically mistaken. Disasters such as barn fires, hazardous materials spills, propane line explosions, ice storms, floods and train derailments can happen anywhere. All of these emergencies may necessitate evacuation, so it is imperative that you are prepared to move your horses to a safe area.

During an emergency, the time you have to evacuate your horses will be limited. With an effective emergency plan, you may have enough time to move your horses to safety. If you are unprepared or wait until the last minute to evacuate, you could be told by emergency management officials that you must leave your horses behind. Once you leave your property, you have no way of knowing how long you will be kept out of the area. If left behind, either loose in a field or in a barn, your horses could be unattended for days without care, food, or water. To help you minimize the risk of this happening, we have prepared information and suggestions to help you plan for emergencies.

Barn Fires: The Leading Disaster for Horse Owners

Preventing barn fires and being prepared in the event of a fire can mean the difference between life and death for your horses and also for those people trying to help. Knowledge of the danger of fires and how to deal with them are of the greatest importance and should be an ongoing concern to horse owners.

Fire Prevention Is Key

- Prohibit smoking in or around the barn. A discarded cigarette can ignite dry bedding or hay in seconds.
- Avoid parking tractors and vehicles in or near the barn. Engine heat and backfires can spark a flame.
- Also store other machinery and flammable materials outside of the barn.
- Inspect electrical systems regularly and immediately correct any problems. Rodents can chew on electrical wiring and cause damage that quickly becomes a fire hazard.
- Keep appliances to a minimum in the barn. Use stall fans, space heaters, and radios only when someone is in the barn.
- Be sure hay is dry before storing it. Hay that is too moist may spontaneously combust. Store hay outside of the barn in a dry, covered area when possible.

Be Prepared for a Barn Fire-It Can Save Your Horse's Life

- Keep aisles, stall doors, and barn doors free of debris and equipment.
- Mount fire extinguishers around the stable, especially at all entrances.
- Have a planned evacuation route for every stall in the barn.
- Familiarize employees and horse handlers with your evacuation plans.
- Post emergency telephone numbers at each telephone and at each entrance. Emergency telephone numbers should include those of the barn manager, veterinarian, emergency response, and other qualified horse handlers.
- Also keep your barn's street address clearly posted to relay to the 911 operator or your community's emergency services.
- Be sure your address and the entrance to your property are clearly visible from the main road.
- Consider installing smoke alarms and heat detectors throughout the barn. New heat sensors can detect rapidly changing temperatures in your barn. The heat sensors should be hooked up to sirens that will quickly alert you and your neighbors to a possible barn fire.
- Host an open house for emergency services personnel in your area to familiarize them with the layout of your property. Provide them with tips on horse handling or present a mini seminar with hands-on training for horse handling.

- Familiarize your horses with emergency procedures and common activities they would encounter during a disaster. Try to desensitize them to flashlights and flashing lights.

In the Event of a Barn Fire

- Immediately call 911 or your local emergency services. Keep that number clearly posted.
- Do not enter the barn if it is already engulfed in flames.
- If it is safe for you to enter the barn, evacuate horses one at a time starting with the most accessible horses. Be sure to put a halter and lead rope on each horse when you open the stall door. Be aware that horses tend to run back into burning barns out of fear and confusion.
- Blindfold horses only if absolutely necessary. Many horses will balk at a blindfold, making evacuation more difficult and time consuming.
- Move your horses to paddocks close enough to reach quickly but far enough from the barn that the horses will not be affected by the fire and smoke. Never let horses loose in an area where they are able to return to the barn.
- After the fire, be sure to have all your horses checked by a veterinarian. Smoke inhalation can cause serious lung damage and respiratory complications. Horses are prone to stress and may colic after a fire.

Horse Evacuation Tips

- Make arrangements in advance to have your horse trailered in case of an emergency. If you do not have your own trailer or do not have enough trailer space for all of your horses, be sure you have several people on standby to help evacuate your horses.
- Know where you can take your horses in an emergency evacuation. Make arrangements with a friend or another horse owner to stable your horses if needed. Contact your local animal care and control agency, agricultural extension agent, or local emergency management authorities for information about shelters in your area.
- Inform friends and neighbors of your evacuation plans. Post detailed instructions in several places-including the barn office or tack room, the horse trailer, and barn entrances-to ensure they are accessible to emergency workers in case you are not able to evacuate your horses yourself.
- Place your horses' Coggins tests, veterinary papers, identification photographs, and vital information-such as medical history, allergies, and emergency telephone numbers (veterinarian, family members, etc.)-in a watertight envelope. Store the envelope with your other important papers in a safe place that can be quickly reached.
- Keep halters ready for your horses. Each halter should include the following information: the horse's name, your name, your telephone number, and another emergency telephone number where someone can be reached.
- Prepare a basic first aid kit that is portable and easily accessible.
- Be sure to have on hand a supply of water, hay, feed, and medications for several days for each horse you are evacuating.
- It is very important that your horses are comfortable being loaded onto a trailer. If your horses are unaccustomed to being loaded onto a trailer, practice the procedure so they become used to it.

This information is provided by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) New England Regional Office. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture Animal Health Division is currently developing an animal disaster response plan for Vermont. For further information on animal disaster planning, contact:

- **The Humane Society of the United States** www.hsus.org/disaster
call (802) 368-2790, email nero@hsus.org.
- **Vermont Agency of Agriculture Animal Health Division** www.vermontagriculture.com
call (802) 828-2421).
- **Vermont Veterinary Medical Association** www.vtvets.org
call (802) 425-3495, email info@vtvets.org.
- **American Veterinary Medical Association** www.avma.org

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