

Disaster and Emergency Preparedness For Horse Owners



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Disaster Preparedness has become a buzz phrase used more and more with the large number of natural disasters we've had to weather in the past year. The Memphis flood in May, Joplin, MO, hurricanes and the list goes on....

During Hurricane Katrina, no pet rescue or aid efforts were a part of government funded human evacuation plans. Groups such as ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), AHA (American Humane Association), and other private and public animal welfare groups played a huge role in saving, re-homing and reuniting pets with their families but thousands of pets were still left behind. The emotional damage pet owners sustained by being forced to leave their pets behind cannot be measured. When many pet owners chose to stay in their homes rather than leave their pets, human rescue efforts were complicated even further. The illnesses and sickness that resulted from having so many abandoned and displaced animals in a concentrated area made a difficult situation even worse. Out of the pain and suffering of Hurricane Katrina came legislation, an amendment to The Stafford Act, called The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act) which requires states seeking Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assistance to accommodate pets and service animals in their plans for evacuating residents facing disasters. Shelters can still separate pets and owners but there are now emergency disaster pet shelters set up to handle stray and owned pets during a disaster.

General Disaster Preparedness Guidelines

****Horse owners have an even more difficult task than dog, cat and pocket pet owners due to a horse's sheer size and transportation needs. Even more planning must go into an equine evacuation plan. ****

****During an emergency there is no more time to prepare, you must simply react so adequate preparation and forethought ahead of time are CRITICAL.**

1. **Your first priority is to make sure YOU are prepared for a disaster.** Your pets are depending on you so you must make sure you are at your best.
 - a. Stay hydrated. During extreme exertion you should be drinking large volumes of water. For every non-water drink you drink, you need 4! waters to make up for it to maintain hydration.
 - b. Wear appropriate clothing. If you are cold and wet your body temperature will be dropping, making your reactions sluggish and leading to a dangerous situation. Waterproof, breathable clothing is a must for foul weather conditions. Layer your clothes and peel off as needed.
 - c. Wear appropriate foot wear. Waterproof boots with good tread are best to prevent you from sliding in slippery footing.
 - d. Take deep breaths and remain as calm as possible. That lead rope you have attached to your horse communicates every thought and feeling so make sure you are maintaining a calm but assertive attitude.
 - e. There is no room for egos in disaster response. If a situation is beyond your capabilities don't be afraid to ask for help from another person if they are available. One horse to rescue is better than one horse plus a person to rescue.
 - f. NO ONE can manhandle a horse. They are too strong. Gentle but assertive guidance is needed.
2. Keep your barn clean and free of debris so horses can be evacuated quickly and safely. Have halters and lead ropes readily available by each horse's stall.
3. Stock pile water and food for you and your pets. Have water bottles stored and large water containers filled. Replace the water in the storage containers every two weeks to keep it fresh. Have at least a week's worth of feed and hay packaged in waterproof containers for your horses.
4. **Develop a Written Disaster Plan**

- Walk around and take a good look at your property, barn and pasture areas and determine if it would be best to try to evacuate or try to secure your horses at home. Make notes on what you would need to do in both instances.
- Contact your county animal disaster team, which is part of your county's emergency management agency. Request information on how their animal rescue teams operate, and what would be expected of you, the owner, in the event of a natural disaster. Request a copy of their list of local animal rescue groups you can call in case your horses becomes lost or injured. Put it with your Disaster Plan.
- Involve all members of your household when formulating your plan so when the time comes everyone will be familiar enough to know what they can do to help.
- Put a copy of your Disaster Plan in a conspicuous place in your home and your barn.

5. Neighborhood Disaster Committees

- Most horse owners live in horse communities. Contact your neighbors long before a natural disaster strikes and organize your own neighborhood disaster committee.
- Schedule meetings at which horse owners discuss who has what in the way of equipment, concrete barns, flood areas, etc., and explore ways in which everyone can pitch in. Neighbors can help neighbors accomplish a great deal. Need Help? Contact your county animal disaster team and they will be glad to help you form such a committee.
- Set up a horse buddy phone tree with nearby horse owners and local farms. **This can be invaluable.** You can share resources such as trailers, pastures or a much needed extra set of hands!

6. Get your horse used to haltering quickly, leading and trotting alongside you so you can move quickly and efficiently in an emergency. Similar to fire drills in school, get your horse used to loading up quickly into a trailer.

****There is a big difference between rushing frantically and moving quickly!
Make sure you stay calm and in control!****

7. Keep your equipment in good repair. A broken halter is no good in an emergency. Make sure your truck and trailer are in good shape and ready to go at a moment's notice. If you don't own a trailer have alternate hauling arrangements prearranged.

8. Have evacuation routes planned. The main one may be cut off so identify multiple routes. Plan to leave ahead of time if you know a disaster is coming.
9. If evacuation is not possible decide on what is safest for your horse (turned out or in the barn) based on the structural stability of your barn and safety of your pastures as well as easy access to food and water.
10. Keep equine vet records in a safe dry place (Ziploc baggy good) where they can be quickly reached. Be sure to post emergency numbers by the phone in your house and your barn. including your 24 hour veterinarian, emergency services and horse friends.
11. Keep your horse up to date on vaccinations and coggins tests. Vaccinations are doubly important in flood disasters where mosquitoes can quickly multiply. Your horses may be forced to house with horses of unknown vaccination status so protecting them is critical. Coggins tests are required for equine transport and should be presented at disaster shelters when you drive in.

Horse Identification

******After Hurricane Andrew 80% of horses had no identification system in place on them so reuniting them with their owners proved difficult and often impossible.

1. Take a photo of your horse with family members in the photo as well. This is an extra measure of security to show you are the actual owner of this horse. Include close up photos of any tattoos, brands, scars or other identifying marks. Staple your coggins to the photos and if microchipped place your chip certificate with your coggins and photos. Keep in a Ziploc baggy in a safe place.
2. Consider microchipping your horse. This is a painless procedure your vet can perform (the site is blocked with lidocaine prior to microchip placement) that permanently identifies your horse. Rescue personnel are trained to scan for chips.
3. Use fetlock ID bands on both forelimbs. These can be ordered from Net Posse. The internet's number one site for locating lost or stolen horses.
4. Consider registering your horse with Net Posse.
5. Place a leather halter on your horse (a leather halter is strong enough to withstand the elements but will break if your horse is really trapped.) Tie a

luggage tag to your horse's halter with your name, phone number, address and medication information. Braid a second luggage tag into your horse's tail with the same information on it. DO NOT tie the tag around your horse's tail, this can cause loss of circulation and severe tail damage. Fill out an index card with any special needs your horse has and place in a baggy and tape around the cheekpiece of the halter.

6. DO NOT put a copy of your horse's coggins on him. This is a passport for unscrupulous people to kidnap your horse and transport him out of state. **Remember you cannot have too much identification on your horse.**

If You Must Leave Animals Behind

1. Have a large sign by your driveway stating how many animals are present-breeds, ages, sex, colors so animal rescue workers will know to look for them.
2. Leave food and water behind and store additional food and water in watertight containers in easily seen locations so rescue workers can easily find it.
3. Know who to call to locate your horse if he/she is lost. Call shelters and the emergency command post. Canvas your neighborhood when it is safe to reenter your home.

To Turnout or Not to Turnout

The choice of keeping your horse in a barn or an open field is entirely up to you. Use common sense, taking into consideration barn structure, trees, power lines, and the condition of surrounding properties.

Turned Out

If you choose to turn your horses out assess your particular situation carefully. The pasture should meet as many of the following guidelines as possible:

- It should be free of exotic trees.
- No overhead power lines.
- It should be well away from areas that might generate wind driven debris.
- It should have both low areas that animals can shelter in during the storm and higher areas that will not be flooded after the storm.

In the Barn

- Remove all items from the barn aisle and walls, and store them in a safe place.
- Have a two weeks supply of hay (wrapped in plastic or waterproof tarp) and feed (stored in plastic water-tight containers). Place these supplies in the highest, driest location possible.
- Place a supply of water and hay with each horse. Remember, trees could be down blocking roads, and you may not be able to return to the barn immediately following the storm. Leave two buckets of water in your horse's stall.
- Have an emergency barn kit containing a chain saw and fuel, hammers, a saw, nails, screws and fencing materials. Place this kit in a secure area before the storm hits.
- Have an ample supply of flashlights and batteries, and at least one battery-operated radio. I like headlamps so my hands are free.
- Using camper tie-downs, secure all vehicles, trailers and maintenance equipment.
- Notify neighbors where you will be during the storm.
- Before leaving the barn, attach identification to all horses.
- Turn off circuit breakers to the barn before leaving. A power surge could cause sparks and fire.
- Take two plywood boards and spray paint on one side of each board, "HAVE ANIMALS, NEED HELP." On the other side of each board paint "HAVE ANIMALS, OK FOR NOW." Put both plywood boards with your feed supply.
- **Do not stay in the barn with your horse during the storm.**

After The Storm

After the storm has passed, roads will probably be blocked or flooded. Working in pairs, try to locate your nearest neighbor.

- Be very careful when you venture outside. Live electric wires could be all around you.
- See to your animal's needs, keeping them as calm as possible.
- Carefully try to clean debris from the barn, and clear the driveway out to the road.
- Place one of the plywood signs you made earlier at the edge of your driveway, at the roadside, with the appropriate writing facing the road. Place the other sign in a clear area with the appropriate side facing upwards. Aircraft will be flying overhead, and this will help them determine the severity of the effects of the storm and help animal rescue workers in their grid searches.

- If you *do not* have a severely injured animal, put the OK sign up. In either case, help will get to you as soon as possible.

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. 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.
- Have 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. In our very hot climate these sometimes go off with the heat in August.

_ 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 miniseminar 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 which may not become evident for several days.

Flooding

1. If you are in a flood plain, plan on evacuating. Horses will not be able to reach forage under water and if the water becomes too high they can obviously drown.
2. Contact your county emergency agency and they will be able to tell you where emergency evacuation barns have been set up. If the flood is limited there may not be a site so contact your horse buddies who live on higher ground for help.
3. Be aware flood waters can contain human waste and other harmful bacteria so if your horses come into contact with flood waters, decontaminate them with Dawn dishwashing soap while wearing gloves and protective clothing (cheap rain jacket and pants which you can throw away.)

Approaching the Unknown Horse in a Disaster Situation

****It takes a lifetime to become a horseperson. A good horseman/woman knows that horses are always teaching them something so the following is only meant to serve as a basic guideline.****

1. Remember horses are prey animals. They will be in fight or flight mode in a disaster. Behavior can be unpredictable.
2. Do NOT put yourself in the “danger zones”:
 - a. Directly and up to 90 degrees behind a horse
 - b. Directly in front of a horse
 - c. Directly above a horse’s head
3. Try to stay at the horse’s shoulder and get a rope around the horse’s neck and ease the rope up towards the ears allowing you to slip a halter onto the horse. *most horses during a disaster will not let you put a halter directly on them.*
4. Keep one hand on the horse at all times, to allow you to feel if the horse is springing into action. Horses are faster than we are at everything so be on guard BUT stay relaxed. If you are nervous and apprehensive this will transmit to the horse and his thought process will be along the lines of “holy crap if she’s nervous there must be something to be scared about so I’m outta here.....”

Getting a TPR and Gut Sounds

1. Normal T (temperature)obtained rectally: 98-100.9
2. Normal P (pulse or heart rate): 28-44
 - athletic fit horses will have lower heart rates
 - elderly horses will have higher heart rates as they depend on rate versus strength of heart contraction to pump blood.
 - heavily pregnant mares will also be higher due to the fact they are beating for two.
3. Normal R (respiratory rate): 8-16, sometimes a little higher in very hot humid conditions.
4. Normal gut sounds: should hear gurgling in all four quadrants. GS are louder when a horse is eating and softer after hard exercise when blood is shunted away from the GI tract to the muscles and quieter when a horse hasn't eaten in a while.
5. **Know what is normal for your horse.**

Bandaging Do's and Don'ts

1. Horses have very poor soft tissue coverage over their lower limbs so it is easy to get a bandage too tight.
2. Leg bandages have from 2-3 parts
 - a. If a wound is involved-an absorbent layer is placed, generally this is 4x4 gauze +/- ointment
 - b. A soft supportive layer-this can be Combine roll, cast padding or my favorite No-Bow bandages
 - c. A securing layer-this can be Vetrap, track bandage or a standing bandage.
3. Hoof bandages-can also have multiple layers
 - a. Basic emergency hoof wrap: diaper and duct tape.
4. Practice makes perfect. We will go over bandaging tonight and then practicing bandaging is the best way to get good at it.
5. DO NOT place Vetrap directly on skin-in can cut into the skin over a short period of time. Leave a ½" to 1" layer of your soft supportive layer peeping out of the top and bottom of the bandage.

6. It's very important to bandage a wide area to keep the bandage from binding. Below are general rules of thumb:
 - a. Hooves-go up to pastern area
 - b. For pastern-go from mid-fetlock down over hoof
 - c. For fetlock-go from below fetlock to just below knee
 - d. For flexor tendons-go from below fetlock to just below knee.
 - e. For knee use a "stack bandage" *will learn how tonight.
7. Keep the roll of your bandage to the outside and roll with gentle even pressure.

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1. Caryn and Benn Holden for the use of their lovely facility and providing goody bags, drinks and our demo horse Caesar.
2. Hall's Feed for providing us with chairs and 2 gift certificates for our Dark Horse Rescue raffle.
3. Dark Horse Rescue for the great job they do providing care and nurturing to abused, neglected and abandoned horses in our area. They provided our volunteers tonight.
4. Coupons from The Stockyard, a new Purina dealer in Arlington.
5. Equine Science for providing bags of bedding for our DHR raffle.
6. And all who helped behind the scenes!

Future Events:

1. Please email us at Jennifer@dunlapequineservices.com or go to our website dunlapequineservices.com regarding future programs