

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR HORSES

Introduction

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

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 hurricane or other national 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.

Neighborhood Disaster Committees

Most horse owners live in horse communities. Contact your neighbors long before hurricane season, 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 neighbors can help neighbors to accomplish a great deal. Need Help? Contact your county animal disaster team and they will be glad to help you form such a committee.

Identification

After Hurricane Andrew, 80% of the horses found carried no identification. This made the job of reuniting animals and owners much more difficult. Veterans of that storm compiled a list of suggestions to help ensure that your animal can be identified in the confusion that follows a hurricane.

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The following list includes a variety of alternatives from which you can choose:

- Take a picture of your horse with a family member in the photo as well. Then staple a copy of your Coggins test to the picture, along with other information such as tattoos, microchip ID, special scars and any other permanent identification. Place all these items in a zip-lock bag, and keep them in a safe place where you can get to them after a hurricane.
- If you choose to stay in your home, but feel that you may be asked to leave it at any time without your horse, make an extra set and take it with you.
- Put a leather halter on your horse with a luggage tag attached showing the horse's name, address, phone number and owner's name. Write any special needs on an index card; place this inside a small zip-lock bag, and wrap it around the side of the halter with tape.
- Purchase fetlock ID bands and place them on both front feet before a hurricane hits.
- Take a second luggage tag with the same information and braid it into the horse's tail hair. Include all medical information. Caution: Do NOT tie the tag around the tail; this would cut off circulation.
- Neck ID bands with the same information can also be used. Check with your local tack store.
- Using small animal clippers, body clip the same phone number on your horse's neck.
- Do not put a copy of the horse's Coggins test on the horse. Animal Rescue may not be the ones to find your horse. A Coggins test is a passport out of state.

One of the goals of Animal Rescue is to find loose horses and get them reunited with the owners as soon as possible. These suggestions will help tremendously. Remember, you cannot have too much identification with your horse.

Vaccinations

The very first thing to do and in many ways the most important is make sure your horse is up-to-date with a tetanus booster and has had a vaccination for encephalitis, commonly known as sleeping sickness. This disease is carried by mosquitoes and the height of infection is July and August, just when storm, hurricane and flood season is at its height.

This disease can kill both humans and horses, and should not be taken lightly. Horses should be vaccinated at least every six months, but most large stables do this every four months.

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See your personal veterinarian for details.

Evacuation

If you plan to evacuate in the event of a storm, have your destination and routes thought out well in advance.

January, February and March would be good months to do this.

Plan to leave 48 hours before the arrival of the storm. The worst thing that can happen to you is to get stuck in traffic with a trailer full of horses and a hurricane approaching.

Hurricanes toss loaded trailers around like they are made of match sticks.

Again, check with local authorities. It is often illegal to evacuate with large animals once a hurricane watch is in effect.

Weathering the Storm at Home

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

The safest place for large animals to weather a storm is in a large pasture. 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 (preferably a pond) and higher areas that will not be flooded after the storm.
- Should have woven wire fencing.
- Be sure to have plenty of identification on your horse.

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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 and driest area 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.
- 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.**

Emergency Animal Care Kit

Prepare an emergency animal care kit (waterproof) with all the items you normally use: medications, salves, ointments, vet wraps, bandages, tape, etc. Place the kit in a safe place where you can get to it after a 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. Here are some other post-disaster pointers:

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- 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.
- 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.

Lessons From Past Disasters

- Collapsed Barns - Owners thought their animals were safe inside their barn.
- Kidney Failure - Due to dehydration, wandering animals were deprived of water for days.
- Electrocutation - Horses sought the lowest areas, in many cases this was a drainage ditch. The power lines that were blown down during the storm were strung over drainage ditches.
- Fencing Failure - Wandering animals, although unharmed during the storm, were hit and killed on the roadways.

End.