

Considerations for Preparing your Horse for a Disaster Situation

Provided by the Jefferson County Horse Council

Prioritize: Your life and your family should always come first, then your animals, then your property. Insurance companies recommend that you have a video or photo inventory of all your important possessions. This should include your tack too! Be sure to check with your insurance agent about having proper policies and coverage.

Make Prior Arrangements: Know your county's evacuation procedures and coordinate various plans, information and phone contacts with neighbors. Have a list of family or friends outside of your area who could house your animals if necessary. If your horses have current Coggins and shots, they may be welcome at most commercial boarding facilities. As a rule, horses picked-up by rescue workers will be taken to the local fairgrounds or a safe holding facility. For a worse case scenario, make sure you have designated someone to make legal, financial and care decisions regarding your horses.

ID Your Horse: Have a halter and lead rope for each horse. If possible, have your name and an emergency contact number other than your home telephone (remember, you may not be home for some time!) on the halter. Dog-type ID tags can work well for this. If necessary, write the information with permanent marker on a duct-tape style collar or spray paint it directly onto your horse.

Prepare your Horse: A well-mannered horse makes rescue efforts easier. Teach your horse to walk on a loose lead, to "stand-stay" at all gates and doorways until being led through, and how to load into a trailer easily and safely. Practice with as many different people and situations as possible, and even include teaching your horse to be tolerant of being touched all over his or her body.

Prepare your Facilities: Keep your barn as safe as possible by selecting fire retardant building materials and clearing trees, shrubbery, and underbrush 20 to 30 feet away from all structures. Remove cobwebs and check electrical wiring annually; and store flammables, feed, and bedding away from where animals are housed. Local fire departments and the U.S. Forest Service will offer other specific recommendations on further prevention measures. If you have a horse trailer, make sure it's in good operating condition. Are the floorboards safe? Are the tires properly inflated? Are the hitches and lights in good working order?

Prepare an Emergency Information Packet: Using heavy sheet protectors or plastic brochure boxes organize all of the necessary paperwork where it can be easily seen and retrieved in case of an emergency. Provide information on each animal including: photographs and a written description; copies of registration/sale papers and brand certificates or travel cards; name and telephone of your veterinarian along with any known allergies, medical or behavioral condition(s); and detailed feed and care information including all supplements and medications. Also include a list of personal contact and insurance information,

Prepare a Disaster Kit. In a large, waterproof container like a trashcan or "Rubbermaid" trunk compile the following items.

- First aid kit including: sharp wire cutters and a knife, bandage scissors, elastic wraps, towels, cotton bandages, compresses, adhesive tape, surgical or bacterial soap and/or saline solution, Epsom salt, fly repellent, antibacterial wound dressing, rectal veterinary thermometer, hoof pick, twitch, and duct tape.
- Prepare hay, grain and supplements in watertight containers
- Water bucket(s) and water or electrolytes if possible because many horses will not readily drink unfamiliar water
- Leg wraps and horse blankets
- Lead ropes, halters, or shanks
- Shovel or manure fork
- Portable radio, flashlights, and extra batteries
- Lime, soap and bleach (disinfectants)
- Prescription medicines and/or a copy of the prescription from your veterinarian so more can be obtained

Be sure to try and have a 10 to 14 day supply of as many items as possible. Blizzards or extensive disaster damage can block roads and prohibit you from getting in or out for extended periods of time.

Time is of the essence! If possible, don't wait until the last minute to evacuate. Disasters can be unpredictable and spread quickly. Animals can also become uncooperative. Remember that accesses can become obstructed and heavy traffic may increase travel times. Anything you do now to prepare for a possible emergency evacuation may save precious minutes and even lives!