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# Planning for **the Unexpected**

by Wendy Hauser, DVM

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**As 2020 has shown us, the ‘unexpected’ can manifest in surprising ways.** Not only did the pandemic upend the horse world, with cancelled and reconfigured equine sporting events, it also brought a host of natural disasters that threatened equine safety. How prepared are you and your horse for natural disasters such as tornados, wild fires, storms and floods?

There is no better time than the present to create or revisit your equine emergency plan.

Included in this plan should be the following:

## **A METHOD TO ESTABLISH PROOF OF OWNERSHIP**

All horse owners dread the thought of being forcibly separated from their horses. During catastrophes, there is always the risk of injury to your horse. It is critical that owners can be readily identified and contacted if separated from their horse.

There are several ways horse owners can accomplish this:

### **1. Microchip your horses**

A microchip is a permanent way to identify the horse and match it to ownership records. It is important to keep contact information up to date, including mobile phone numbers and emergency contacts.

## 2. Provide other means of identification.

If your horse is found by a Good Samaritan, they may not have immediate access to a microchip reader. To help reunite more quickly with your horses, the following methods can be used:

- **Paint your phone number** on the horse's side using non-toxic spray paint
- **Braid a luggage tag into the mane** of the horse. Be sure to use waterproof pens to write your contact information on the tag.
- **Have a halter tag on hand** with your name and phone number. This can be woven in the mane or tail, similar to the luggage tag.
- **Shave your phone number** on the horse's side with clippers.

Should you take these proactive steps, use a cell phone number. If your horse is evacuated, there is a good chance you will be too.

## WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS IF YOU NEED TO EVACUATE YOUR HORSE?

If evacuation is necessary, your plan should include:

### 1. When should you evacuate?

Situations that are unsafe for you will be unsafe for your horse; it is better to evacuate earlier than later. It might be wiser to evacuate before an official evacuation order is enacted, rather than procrastinate and run the risk of being told by emergency management officials that you must leave your horses behind and unattended.

## 2. Where will you take your horse?

Know your options are before you are faced with a forced relocation. Identify friends that can provide refuge or horse stables outside of the area likely to be unaffected by the disaster.

Other resources include local animal care agencies, county agricultural extension agents and emergency management authorities that can provide information outside of the area. Often, fairgrounds, show grounds and veterinary colleges are designated as large animal evacuation sites.

## 3. How will you get there?

- **Have access to a trailer.** If you don't own a trailer, pre-arrange transportation for your horses. Friends, neighbors, or local stable owners might be willing to pre-commit to helping you evacuate your horse in an emergency. It is recommended to have several different people who can help.

If you own your own trailer, inspect it regularly and perform needed maintenance so it is ready and available when you most need it.

- **All horses should be trained to load into trailers easily.** Practice loading and unloading during low stress times, so that your horse is prepared should an emergency occur.
- **Identify at least two evacuation routes to get you and your horses to safety.** Redundancies are important in emergency planning; your preferred evacuation route may not be safe or could be blocked.

#### 4. What will you need?

- **Many evacuation sites require proof of vaccinations.** It is advisable to keep your horse's medical information, including veterinary contact information, vaccination history, Coggins test results, medical records, and noted allergies in a waterproof pouch.

Identification, such as microchip numbers, photographs of your horse which highlight identifiable markings and emergency contact information should also be included.

This packet should be stored in a convenient location, in the event of a speedy evacuation.

- **If your horse receives medications, this information should be included in the emergency packet.** Include the drug name, dose and frequency of administration, along with the prescribing veterinarian's contact information. Be prepared to evacuate with at least a two-week supply of the medication.
- **If possible, you should take about a week's worth of hay and grain per horse evacuated.**

#### WHAT IF YOU CAN'T EVACUATE YOUR HORSE?

There are some situations that prevent evacuation of horses, such as during tornados or rapidly spreading wildfires. What can an owner do to keep their horses safe?

#### 1. Have a back-up plan if you have to leave your horses behind

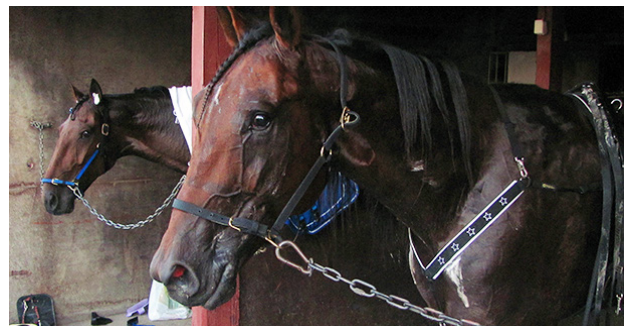
- **Depending on the type of emergency,** they may be safer loose in a field than in a barn.
- **Provide copious amounts of readily accessible water,** in multiple locations.

Automatic watering stations are great, but they won't work if there is no electricity.

- **Provide adequate hay,** in multiple locations and preferably in places where the hay will stay dry.
- **Clearly provide your contact information on your horse, as discussed above.**

#### 2. Create a neighborhood network of horse owners, and share evacuation plans with each other.

Additionally, share with friends that are not in the immediate area as well as with emergency management services. Your plans should be posted in several places in the barn, and on the doors of your home to help emergency response teams find the information in case you have to leave your horses behind.





## WHAT IF YOUR HORSE IS INJURED?

It is not uncommon for horses to be injured during natural disasters. Veterinary bills can be worrisome in the best of times, let alone when you are facing the loss of income and property. Equine health insurance is one way that horse owners can be prepared for future health care expenses. It helps allow horse owners to focus on providing optimal medical care for the horse, rather than focusing on the cost of care.

For more information about affordable equine health insurance programs\* that provide coverage for accidents, illness and colic, please visit [ProtectYourHorse.com](https://ProtectYourHorse.com).

Evacuating during a natural disaster is stressful and scary. One way to manage the unexpected and create positive outcomes for humans and horses alike is have emergency plans in place, and update them regularly.

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