

Be Prepared for Emergencies

BE PREPARED? YEAH, RIGHT! Admittedly, **no one can be completely prepared** to deal successfully with any and every emergency, no matter how much planning and preparation are carried out. So, why all the flurry about how to get ready for the unexpected? While you can't know in advance exactly how to deal with each crisis that comes along, you can take **a few simple steps now to minimize confusion, save time, and possibly avoid tragedy** in the future.

Keeping people safe is the first consideration, and every family should work out places to meet and ways to keep in touch if disaster strikes. Because local communication may be disrupted, choose an out-of-state friend or relative to act as a family contact person.

For those who own pets or large animals, the care of these creatures is also a serious concern. Statistics show that:

- up to **25% of the population will refuse to evacuate** their homes if they are told animals must stay behind;
- **30 to 50% of pet owners will have no plan** and will leave their pets behind, even if they have had advance notice that evacuation will be ordered;
- **50-70% of those who have left animals behind will attempt to re-enter** an evacuated site to care for or transport their pets, possibly putting themselves in danger.

If you have thought about how pets and large animals will be managed in the event of an emergency, you'll have at least **a preliminary plan to keep these animals safe.**

Horses need a safe place to stay; plenty of clean, fresh drinking water (at least 10 to 12 gallons a day) to avoid fatal dehydration; and enough grass, hay, or other forage (at least 15 pounds a day) to prevent digestive upsets. Meeting these three critical requirements should be the framework for equine emergency planning.

FIRST, GATHER INFORMATION. Identify the **types of emergencies or disasters** that could occur in your region. Are you likely to be affected by natural or weather-related conditions like ice storms, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, severe heat, drought, or earthquakes? Could your property be threatened by fire, chemical spills on nearby highways, or toxic emissions from factories in the area? Your action **plan will be different** for each type of crisis that could occur.

Find out what **disaster plans are already in place** in your community. Contact police departments and emergency service organizations to ask about **evacuation routes, animal shelters or holding areas** for large animals, and existing plans that relate to horses. *Ask to have such plans drawn up and publicized if they don't already exist.*

Even if you think you're familiar with community disaster planning, do you really **understand what will happen** in an emergency? For example, when you hear a storm siren, does it mean storms are probable, or that a tornado is five minutes away? Will you hear a different signal when the danger has passed? *Ask to have answers clarified and publicized.*

NEXT, GATHER EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES. For horses, forage (grass or hay) and water are absolute necessities. **A three-day supply for each horse—at minimum, one bale of hay and 30 gallons of water—is a good start.** Give some thought to how these supplies can be gathered, stored, and transported if necessary.

A **halter and lead shank** for each horse are also needed. Are these hanging in an easily accessible place in the barn, or can extra halters and lead shanks be stored in a central location where no one will “borrow” them? Do halters need to be repaired, or a few spares purchased?

Grain, supplements, medications, equipment—which are really important? You can’t know all the answers for every situation, but you should concentrate on rounding up whatever you need to **keep the horse’s management as close to normal as possible.** Simple first aid supplies (bandages, antibiotic cream) and telephone numbers for local and area veterinarians should also be gathered.

EVACUATING YOUR ANIMALS. It goes without saying that, as part of their early education, your **horses should be taught to load** willingly into various types of trailers. If you don’t have your own transportation (truck and trailer), talk to friends and neighbors who might help. Find the **phone numbers for possible shelters or secure turn-out areas** in surrounding cities and counties. For small animals, these would include animal rehabilitation centers, veterinary clinics, humane organizations, and boarding kennels. For large animals, add **racetracks, fairgrounds, stockyards, ranches, private farms, 4-H facilities, high school and college agricultural programs, and county agricultural extension services.**

Be aware that main roads may be closed by storms or clogged with traffic. Assemble maps and look at **alternate travel routes.** Instead of transporting your horses, could you lead or ride them to safety closer to home?

KEEPING ANIMALS AT HOME. Depending on the circumstances of the emergency, the best or only course of action may be to **leave your animals in place.** Three of the leading dangers to large animals in a disaster area are **fence failure, electrocution from downed power lines, and injuries from structure collapse.** Identify the pasture or area where animals will be safest from these and other hazards like flood waters.

If you must leave the property, put supplies of **hay and water** where horses can reach them. **Don’t leave grain available,** as overconsumption of concentrated feed is dangerous for horses.

Keep in mind that, especially if fences have been damaged, your pasture may contain wild animals or domestic animals that don’t belong to you, so **check all parts of the fence and field** before turning your horses out. *Be alert and cautious when dealing with your animals; no matter how well you know them, stressed or frightened animals are unpredictable.*

IDENTIFYING HORSES. Some emergency situations may involve loose horses, yours or someone else’s. There are two parts to this problem: how to **attach identification to your horse,** and how to put together descriptions and documents that will allow you to **reclaim your horse** from a shelter. Because of the many unknown factors in any crisis, it’s impossible to overdo either consideration. Writing multiple phone numbers (cell, home, out-of-state friend) on the horse with paint, grease pencil, or permanent marker is an option. You can attach a luggage tag with pertinent information to a horse’s halter or neck strap, realizing that the halter or strap may get lost or snagged on something. **Braiding a luggage tag into the horse’s mane** may be the best idea.

Keep photographs and a detailed written description of each horse, noting brands, tattoos, scars, and markings. Update the descriptions from time to time, and leave duplicate copies with a friend or family member in another state.

THINK OF ALTERNATIVES. Unfortunately, no emergency situation will be an exact fit for the preparations you have made. For this reason, your **planning is always a work in progress.** By being aware of potential problems and considering alternate solutions, you can be at least partially prepared for whatever comes your way.