



# Emergency Evacuation Planning Checklist for Horses

Wildfires can quickly become a real threat to rural landowners. It's easy to think fires only happen to other people, but this can lead to tragic consequences. Ensure that you can take action quickly by using this checklist to create an emergency evacuation plan for yourself and your horses.

## Supplies

### **Keep extra keys for gates, trailers, tack rooms, your house, etc. in a safe location**

In the event of an emergency, the last thing you'll want is to have to hunt for lost keys. Storing spare copies of important keys in one location for use *only* in emergencies will make it easy to "grab and go."

### **Firesafe gear for you and your horse**

While it might seem like a good idea to cover your horse in a blanket, sheet, or fly mask, sparks from a nearby fire can land on and melt nylon, causing severe burns. Instead, equip your horse with leather or cotton halters and lead ropes. Make sure you also have protective clothing for yourself, including long pants, long-sleeved cotton or wool shirts, sturdy leather gloves, a wide-brimmed hat, a cotton bandana, and leather boots with good tread.



### **Identification markers**

If you and your horses were to get separated, having your identification details available will help you be reunited. A few options include microchipping, writing your phone number on your horse's hoof with a permanent marker or on their hip with a non-toxic paint pen, or braiding an ID tag into their mane. Keep markers or pre-filled tags in your emergency kit to save time.

### **Horse first aid kit**

Keep this well stocked and be sure to include any medication your horse takes regularly.

### **Food and water**

Plan now to ensure you have a safe way to transport adequate feed and water for your horses.

## Preparing Your Horses

### **Decide which horses to take**

If you have more horses than will fit on your trailer, make arrangements ahead of time with friends or family who can be available to help transport them. If you still don't have enough room, you might have to make the difficult decision to leave some behind. Such decisions are heartbreaking, but it is better to make them now than when adrenaline and emotions are running high.



### **Train your horses for evacuation**

Make sure all horses are trained to load and unload safely, even in high-stress situations and unfamiliar locations. Consider desensitization training to familiarize your horse with stimuli such as flashing lights, sirens, people moving quickly, strange clothing, etc. You might even consider contacting your local fire department to ask them to help you teach your horse to be comfortable around fire personnel in full gear. (Tip: a fractious, nervous horse may calm down if temporarily blindfolded.)

## Evacuation Plan

### **Plan your barn evacuation route**

Have an evacuation plan for every stall in the barn.

### **Choose your destination(s) in advance**

Consider friends or family members with horse-safe property, stockyard or sales yards, fairgrounds, show facilities, racetracks, or large parks. Contact your veterinarian, state department of agriculture, county extension office, or local emergency management authorities for information about shelters in your area, and make sure you secure permission ahead of time. You might want to have multiple potential destinations on standby in case your first choice is unavailable when the time comes.

### **Enlist help**

Coordinate ahead of time with friends and family members who can help in an emergency. Keep contact numbers in your emergency kit, and notify helpers as soon as possible when an emergency arises.

### **Plan your route**

When deciding where you will go, be sure to plan multiple routes to get there in case routes are blocked by fallen trees, power lines, abandoned cars, or firefighting vehicles.

## Stay Informed

Tune in to your local news media for fire coverage and safe evacuation routes. In some cases, you may not receive any official warning that a fire is coming. Watch weather conditions and fire behavior. Be alert for sudden shifts in wind direction and speed, dramatic changes in air temperature or humidity, smoke, or ash and burning embers dropping around you. Remember, evacuating late is a deadly option.

## When You Leave

### Provide property access for emergency officials

This might include leaving a front gate open or unlocked so emergency vehicles can enter.

### Make sure the horses you leave behind are as safe as possible

Do not leave horses in stables or small areas. Never turn equines loose on roads as they can block roads and emergency equipment and even cause accidents, for which you might be legally responsible. Instead, turn them out in a **firesafe area**: a large sand arena, dry lot, or overgrazed field surrounded by fire-proof fencing (metal panels or wire with concrete posts). The bigger the area the better. Leave these horses with proper identification (see above), and put food and water in metal containers in the center of the enclosure. Most horses can cope on their own if there is enough space to move around.



*This sand arena would be a good enclosure for horses that cannot be safely evacuated.*

### Protect your house, barn, and other structures

Turn off power, gas, and electrical fencing to reduce the risk of explosions or sparks causing additional fires. Activate your sprinkler system.

Remember, the time to plan is NOW. Research shows that individuals who don't begin Firewise planning immediately are unlikely to make changes. Plan today to keep you and your horses safe.

For help mitigating the fire risk on your horse property, refer to Horses for Clean Water's FREE checklist, *Minimizing Wildfire Risks on Horse Properties*, at <http://www.horsesforcleanwater.com/tip-sheets/minimizing-wildfire-risks-on-horse-properties>

Our website also has a variety of other firewise and emergency preparedness resources at <http://www.horsesforcleanwater.com/firewise-emergency-preparedness>.