



Minimizing Wildfire Risk on Horse Properties



Wildfire is a very real concern for horse owners, especially with a warming planet and for those who live in the dry climates of the American West. Extreme temperatures, limited summer rainfall, strong winds, and lightning storms all lead to high fire danger. Windblown embers from a nearby fire can travel a mile or more, landing on and igniting buildings or other combustibles and putting you and your horses at risk. This checklist will help you identify and reduce wildfire threats on your horse property, farm, or ranch.

Create defensible space around important structures

Defensible spaces are areas that are landscaped and maintained to reduce fire danger by keeping vegetation and combustibles to a minimum. Having a defensible space reduces the risk that fire will spread to or between structures on your property, and provides firefighters and emergency officials with a safer defense point should you have a fire. **A minimum defensible space of 100 feet is recommended for homes and outbuildings on flat ground.** Because fire acts differently on hillsides, **defensible space for structures on sloped sites should be at least 200 feet.**

Choose firewise landscaping

Choose landscaping plants that have high moisture content, high salt or soap content, low-growing/compact growth, low oil or resin content, green stems, small leaves, or high drought tolerance. Visit <https://thehorse.com/135408/firewise-landscaping-for-horse-properties> for examples.



Remove flammable yard decorations

Replace wooden patio furniture, brooms, flower boxes, flammable doormats (such as the popular coconut mats), and other combustible items with non-flammable varieties made out of metal or ceramic.

Opt for non-flammable fencing

Not only will wooden or plastic fencing burn in a fire, but it can draw a fire right to your barn. Replace flammable fencing with non-flammable options such as metal panel fencing or welded pipe.

Replace combustible siding or roofing

Cedar shake shingles, wood, vinyl, and plastics can all catch fire easily. Replace combustible roofing and

siding with non-combustible options such as metal, tile, brick, or adobe. Green roofs are also an excellent option with the added conservation benefits of slowing water runoff, conserving energy, improving air quality, reducing noise, and providing wildlife habitat.



Clear weeds and debris

Weeds like cheatgrass are extremely flammable when dry. Remove weeds through grazing, mowing, prescribed burning, or herbicide use. Keep vegetation that is within 100 feet of structures grazed low and green during fire seasons. Regularly clear leaves and other debris out of your gutters, off of your roofs, and away from the base of each structure. Check rafters for cobwebs, which can trap dust and flammable debris.

Store combustible items away from important structures

Hay, bedding, large manure piles, and livestock feed should be stored away from stables in a dry, covered area. Maintain a 12-30 foot firebreak of cleared land such as a gravel driveway, concrete pad, or dirt path between storage areas and other structures. Keep propane and other fuels 30 feet from buildings, wood fences, and other structures. Regularly clean up wind-blown debris or weeds that accumulate in these areas.

Practice basic barn fire safety

Inspect electrical systems and replace damaged wires. Install smoke detectors and replace batteries every six months. Keep fire extinguishers next to doorways in barns and in vehicles and tractors. Keep barn aisles and doors clean and free of obstruction to provide quicker access in an emergency. Post important phone numbers (barn manager, vet, etc.) and your barn's street address next to the phone for easy reference when communicating with emergency personnel.

Prepare for emergency response personnel

Post your address at the entrance to your property in a spot that's clearly visible from the road. Make sure fire trucks and emergency vehicles can access your property by checking for overhead utility lines, tree branches, ranch gates or signs, rocks or other landscaping, or other potential obstructions.

Remember: Even with the best defensible spaces, sometimes evacuation is the best option when wildfire is imminent. Planning and preparing for an emergency evacuation ahead of time will help keep everyone safe. Refer to Horses For Clean Water's FREE Firewise Evacuation Checklist for help creating your evacuation plan *before* the threat of wildfire becomes real.

<http://www.horsesforcleanwater.com/tip-sheets/firewise-evacuation-checklist>