

**EMERGENCY ANIMAL  
RESPONSE SERVICE**



# **Preparing For Equine Emergencies**

**The Emergency Animal Response Service**



## Disaster Concepts: Dealing With Equine Emergencies

The Emergency Animal Response Service was founded on the motto that “Disasters don’t just happen ‘someplace else’ anymore,” and equine-related incidents are no exception. In just the last few years there has been increased media coverage of equine emergencies from barn fires, to trailer accidents, to weather-related disasters, and although the examples are present, there are still many who have not taken steps to properly prepare for these situations. Sometimes it’s simply that people don’t think it will ever happen to them, but more often than not it’s because they aren’t sure where to start. Our goal with this program is to provide you with the information you need to get prepared, and in order to do that you need to know what to be prepared for!

First, two very simple definitions:

An **EMERGENCY** is a “single incident event,” meaning that it does not have a wide spread effect or involve multiple properties or a large area. These situations are contained to a single property, and although not all equine emergencies need to involve local fire departments or other services, they are frequently being called out to assist in these situations, so large animal training is becoming more needed for first responders.

*Examples: Barn Fires, Structure Collapses, Down Horses, Burst Pipes, etc.*

A **DISASTER** presents its own set of difficult circumstances, specifically because these incidents do effect multiple locations, or even a wide-spread area, and may result in local emergency responders being overwhelmed with calls and activations. The best way to keep yourself and your animals safe during an emergency is to be prepared with a disaster plan in place and a trained group of individuals who can assist you. In times of disasters, you may be on your own for hours, or even days, so you need to assure you have your own supplies ready.

*Examples: Hurricanes, Blizzards, Extended Power / Water Issues, etc.*

Identifying the hazards that are likely to affect your property and your area is the first step in beginning to make a plan. In this area most people consider hurricanes and blizzards, but forget about the potential for floods, fires, tornadoes, and other issues. It is estimated that the United States suffers more than 150,000 household fires, 10,000 violent thunderstorms, 5,000 floods, 800 tornadoes, and other weather issues including hurricanes, blizzards, ice storms, and impacting weather fronts. This is why it is so important to be “actively aware” of what’s going on. This means if there is a threat of any type of weather hazard, you should be checking on it frequently to make sure of what the expectations and developments are.

The key to being safe during an emergency is to be as prepared as possible, and because emergencies are almost always unpredictable, it is important to know what to do whether you are at home or somewhere else. One thing we all know with emergencies is that they rarely happen where and when you would like them to – if you had to choose a time and place – so you have to be ready “on the fly” for emergencies. Owners have the ultimate responsibility for their animals, and while community disaster plans try to incorporate the care of animals and their owners in their plans, they can only coordinate care — they cannot always provide it. The best way to be prepared is to create a personal emergency plan that includes provisions to care for your animals.

In any situation, knowing what to do, who to call for help, what resource are available, and making sure you have your own is the best way to stay safe, but even the best supplied person cannot make up for having a plan in place and being prepared. Too often people get in to the “check list” mode – which is what we call it when people print out or find lists of things to do, and limit themselves to only doing those set items – no plan is good unless it has been practiced, reviewed, and updated regularly.

Here are some equine-specific things to consider when developing an emergency plan:

Assess the risks in your area and determine what you may most likely face. Different emergencies may require different actions, for example sheltering-in-place or evacuating with your horses. In thinking about possible scenarios, also think about what you might need to make sure you can safety get through – and recover – from these incidents.

Look first at what you already have on your property or around you. Identify what you can do to minimize the consequences.

Establish a protocol. If an emergency happens, what do you need to do first, second, third, etc. Also remember that you may not be present, so do others have a set step of actions to take?

Plan for a shelter-in-place situation by looking at your property to find the best location to confine your animals in the event their normal location is unsafe. Then plan for an evacuation and consider where you will be able to allow for vehicle access, multiple entries or exits, etc. If you own a smaller barn or property, vehicle access may be easier and safer at a location that is walkable.

Check with your veterinarian to confirm what tests or immunizations are advisable and to be sure that your horses' medical history is on-record and up-to-date. At a minimum, each horse should have documented Coggins and Rabies test results.

Keep a clear, written, horse identification profile for EACH horse on your property (see examples later). This profile should include special feed requirements and medicines with dosing instructions along with any other specific information for each horse.

Find a “Buddy Barn” to work together on emergency plans. Not only can this provide you with extra hands in the event of an emergency, but additionally for issues calling for shelter-in-place situations you can share resources like generators, water tanks, feed, and trailers.

Make sure that you have a written, and signed, document stating your intent of care for your animals, or someone who you appoint as a decision maker, in the event you are not present.

**ALWAYS SHARE AND PRACTICE ANY PLAN YOU DEVELOP.** Be sure that in your absence someone would know what to do.

Here are some things to ask yourself:

Do you have a written and shared preparedness plan in place?  
Do you have a first aid and disaster kit specifically for your animals?  
Have you considered any special needs your animals may have?





## Barn Safety & Fire Emergencies

Every year, close to 200 horses are reported to have died in barn fires in the United States. Many barn fires could be prevented by good barn design/ construction, strict personnel policies, and clear directives about how the barn and equipment should be maintained.

### Have A Plan

Post fire and emergency numbers in prominent locations in the barn and assure that anyone who may be on site knows where they are located. If your facility is spread out, make sure that each sign has the exact location of where you are on the property. Make sure that those who might call 9-1-1 for a fire specify whether or not animals are inside.

Make sure that your plan is practiced regularly and updated as needed. Remember that a plan for a summer emergency may be different than one in the winter. Also make sure that your plan is written down so that people can review it regularly and keep up to date.

Don't store fuel, pesticides, or other flammable liquids in barns. Identify such materials clearly, and place them in a physically separated storage shed. Make sure that people know the location of utilities shutoffs, as well as know how to use them.

Remove obstructions to barn walkways and exits. Relocate equipment as necessary to keep aisles and doorways clear. Keep aisles swept clean of hay and bedding. Remove all trash to containers outside of barns daily. Inside barns, use waste containers constructed of non-combustible material with self-closing lids.

Leave designated emergency halters and lead ropes in one specific location so they can be immediately accessible. Designate paddocks away from the barn (several hundred feet or more) where horses can be temporarily housed in case of fire or any other emergency stable evacuations.

Ensure you know fire alarm and extinguisher locations, as well as the operation of each.

Light fixtures for fluorescent lights should have dust and moisture resistant covers. Incandescent bulbs should have globe with seals that are dust and moisture proof, and surrounded by a cage to prevent accidental breakage.

Start by taking a barn safety inventory:

- FARM WATER SUPPLY: Source & Location
- FIRE WATER SUPPLY: Source, Capacity, Location
- WATER ACCESSIBILITY Problems? Winter?
- FIRE EXTINGUISHERS: How many? Location?
- SPECIAL CONDITIONS
- EMERGENCY Paddock
- EXIT / EVACUATION ROUTES

Panicked animals behave unpredictably or refuse to respond to normal handling approaches. They may trap themselves and their rescuers in a rapidly spreading fire. Formulate an emergency fire plan and practice it regularly with family members and employees. Likewise, conduct periodic fire safety inspections. Your barn should have fire extinguishers next to each exit, next to the electrical



## Working With Emergency Responders

First responders dispatched to barn emergencies frequently face difficult circumstances that can result in delays and inaccessibility to sites. This includes everything from obstructions that arriving emergency vehicles face (such as low-hanging tree limbs, small access roads, locked gates, etc.). Each of these can slow responders down, so here are some things to keep in mind for your property that could impact response time in an emergency.

If your farm is gated assure that you have someone designated to rush to the entrance and provide access for responders. You also need to assure that the fire department can access your property if you are not around. Consider installing a bypass for emergency responders.

Evaluate the driveway that responding trucks will have to navigate and be sure there is enough width and height for the trucks to maneuver.

Know ahead of time where the horses will be turned out once they're safely out of the barn, and be sure to secure all gates to the turn-outs to prevent the horses from escaping during an already chaotic time.

Designate an emergency vehicle parking area and make sure it is clear at all times.

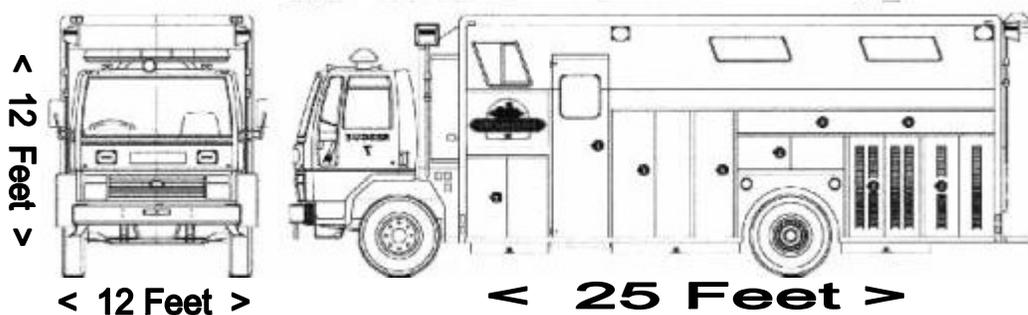
Make sure your address is posted very clearly in reflective numbers at the road.

Clear any overhanging branches, gravel or other improved base from your property access.

Know the location of all water sources on or near your property.

Have a layout of your property posted and easily accessible at your location, as well as provide a copy to the fire department.

Do a walkthrough with your fire department and find out if they notice or suggest anything that you should change.



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## The Three P's: Planning, Practicing, & Promoting

Horses require a vastly different set of considerations than “average” animals including special transportation needs, alternative evacuation routes, experienced handlers, and of course necessary trailer supplies. This is why with horses “The Three P’s” are especially important.

### Plan:

Consider what potential issues may effect your location, develop a response, and frequently review all considerations, contact local response service and provide your information

### Practice:

Make stable safety a priority all the time, have a system to address concerns, look outside the box, take things seriously, hold regular meetings and training, assign tasks – don’t fall in to routine.

### Promote:

Post emergency plan, create stable and property information sheets, pay attention to warnings, update your policies and plans.

**Water:** Dehydration is a major cause of death for horses in disasters of all kinds. Storm runoff may contaminate natural water supplies; power failures may knock out your well pump, and even municipal water supplies may be interrupted.

- Figure on 12 to 20 gallons per horse per day, and have at least a three-day supply (seven is better) on hand.
- Store water in clean 55-gallon drums, and fill all troughs and other containers on the property. Line garbage cans with plastic trash bags and fill them, too.
- Have chlorine bleach on hand to purify water if necessary. Add two drops of bleach per quart of water and let stand for 30 minutes.

**Feed:** Deliveries may be interrupted. Have enough feed and hay on hand for at least three to seven days, stored in a dry, secure area. Put feed and hay on pallets and cover with water-repellent tarps to reduce the chance of water damage.

**Power:** Have a gasoline-powered generator on hand so that you can power critical equipment (such as your well pump).

### **Keep A Disaster Kit:**

**Develop a barn "Fire and Safety Evacuation Plan" and post it in a clearly visible place.**

**For Each Horse:** Have an emergency horse profile, with attached pictures and identifying information. Permanently identify all horses via a microchip or other method that can assure they will be identified and reunited if lost.