

Disaster and Fire Season Precautions and Planning

Published in Natural Horse
Magazine 2005
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With all of us just witnessing the horror in the south from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I felt compelled to send this out just one more time as a reminder that many people never thought it could happen to them, and it did! In California we do not have the benefit of knowing that we are facing a natural disaster, with the benefit of a time frame to evacuate... earthquakes and fires just happen with no notice here!

Having been through one of the worst fires in Southern California history, just two years ago, and also through the Elfin Forest/ La Costa fires almost 8 years ago now, I am very aware of what needs to be done in preparation for fire season, and because of the recent fires in the past couple of days as well as the earthquakes, it makes me realize that I need to stay prepared in the event of an unplanned catastrophic incident.

A reminder:

Always keep at least a half tank of gas at all times in tow vehicle, as well as make sure that vehicle has regular maintenance and your trailer is ready and accessible to hook up.



Now is the time to check that your trailer is in good order, air in tires, floors checked for wear and welds, and make sure brakes have been checked, etc.

Trailer train your horses (I cannot stress this one enough) so they will get in no matter what and right away, even if you don't have a trailer of your own. Borrow one, rent one, but get it done - if your horses have to be evacuated, the emergency evacuation volunteers will only give each horse a maximum 10-15 minutes to get in and they will go to the next horse, leaving yours behind because you had not taken the time to get him to load! Many, many people in the Paradise fires had never gotten around to trailer loading and lost their animals in the fire simply because they would not get in and they were left behind! **Trailer train your horses!!!!** Again, can't stress that

enough - so many people in the past fires wished they had, when it was too late, and too many horses were lost or died that shouldn't have, if only their owners had taken the time to trailer train them!

Horses:

Use a leather halter with cotton lead rope when evacuating, with metal id tag with their name and your cell phone number or contact number (the reason I say *leather* is that during a fire a nylon halter can melt on your horse's face causing severe burns and disfiguration if he were to get loose). The name tag is for easy identification and they can be purchased at most pet stores and maybe online.

Hay Nets: Fill a hay net for each horse; it is easier to transport than bales of hay especially if you have limited space to haul items. A good hay net can hold more than 25 pounds of feed, enough to get you through until you can get your horses settled. Fill one for each horse you are evacuating.

Water: Bring at least a 5-gallon jug of water for your horses, and buckets; at least you will have enough for wherever you are going and can make arrangements for more.

Buckets: I bring 1 blue and 1 green large rope handle bucket for each horse, one for food and one for water.

Supplements and Meds: Bag up, in zip-lock bags, at least 7 days worth of supplements along with medications your horse(s) may be taking. I know with my 4-year-old she is on a special diet for

a medical condition and she would get very sick without her "goolosh bags"! Don't forget to bring the bucket or bowl you mix and feed these in.

Equine/ Small Animal First Aid Kit: I always carry mine in the trailer anyway, but it is great to have gauze, vet wrap, items to treat scratches and cuts - also betadine, and any other first aid items that you usually keep on hand at home including Traumeel (tablets, crème, etc.) and a homeopathic first aid kit too if you use one.

Also include Rescue Remedy and any flower essences or essential oils that will help to calm your horse (and you!), or other people's horses, during an evacuation. Other items of value, if you use them, would be 'bute' or 'Banamine' along with syringes and needles, or in the paste forms, in the event that your or another person's horse would need them during any emergency when there may be no vet available to get any. You might want to include a supply of probiotics and digestive enzymes/ aids to help prevent colic or colic-like symptoms due to the stress of evacuation and/or change in feed stuff.

Gear: If you have time and space, saddles, bridles, blankets, et al.

The safest place for your horses to be in the event that you have to evacuate without them is in an arena or their own "dry" pasture, that has no incendiary brush or tree limbs in or hanging over it. Around here the horses that were left behind **and** that survived were the ones

the owners **did not** turn loose, but left them in their own pasture, or arena, some with a sprinkler turned on and water troughs full along with a bale or two of hay in the middle depending upon the number of horses.

As many of us have witnessed watching hurricane coverage, there were horses who could not escape from their stalls inside of barns in Louisiana and Mississippi. Those horses were trapped inside their stalls, left standing in chest and deeper water, not able to escape, and rescuers were not able to get in to get them. I myself cannot imagine what physical, let alone mental shape, these horses were in if they in fact were finally rescued.

Do not turn your horse(s) loose with a halter on; instead, if you have to turn them loose, braid an ID tag (like a leather luggage tag) into their manes, or use a permanent black waterproof marker to put your phone number (preferably cell phone in the event of an emergency or contact number in the event of emergency) on their butts or hip, as they could end up any where during an evacuation and people could then try to contact you. Others have suggested a piece of duct tape with your phone number or contact number on it placed on their butts, but I don't know if it would work (may not stick or stay on).

Board Facilities/Training Facilities: Owner's who do not have their horses at home need to encourage the places where they stable their horses to have an evacuation/disaster preparedness

plan. The facilities close to my home have them in place, owner's know where their horses will be taken in the event of evacuation, they also have people to call, and they have a plan to trailer horses out as well in the event the owner cannot get there for what ever reason to get their horse(s) out. My friend Sally who owns Tapestry Meadows also offers seminars on trailer training, where they have several types of trailers hooked up and everyone who boards with her knows their horses will get in to whatever trailer is available to get them out!

Small Animals (Cats and Dogs, and Other Pets):

Leather collars with id tags and leashes
Carriers for small animals, especially cats

Two weeks worth of food (dry and wet) and water (I keep this in my horse trailer during this time of year so I don't have to worry about grabbing food at the last minute and a gallon of water for the little critters)

A makeshift litter box and litter for kitties (disposable aluminum roasting pans work great)

A can opener

Paper plates and metal bowls for water

A blanket or two or towels to cover the carriers, or for them to sleep on

If for some reason you cannot take your small pets, make sure they have collars with ID tags as well as at least 2 weeks of water and food. I would not recommend leaving any animal if the disaster was a fire or flood, as their chance of survival would be minimal. Make friends with your neighbors;

someone in your neighborhood might be able to get your animals out if they know you have them and if you cannot get home to get them yourself. What you find during disasters is that people want to help if they can, especially with rescuing animals. Make sure a trusted neighbor has a key to your house so they could get in to get your pets.

Also have a sign in the window or posted on a front door as to how many pets you have and if they are cats, dogs, iguanas, parrots, or whatever, so that rescue people will know there are pets to rescue. Pets will hide during a disaster and rescuers may not know they are there - unless you have a sign posted, they won't know to look for them, lessening their chances of survival.

People Things:

HAVE AN EVACUATION/DISASTER PLAN AND A PERSON NOT IN THE AREA FOR ALL FAMILY MEMBERS TO PHONE TO CHECK IN WITH.

** Cell phone and cell phone chargers (cigarette lighter and wall - this is the one thing several of my friends forgot and their phones went dead and we could not reach them for two days to see if they needed help)

Family photos and albums, as well as other irreplaceable items

Prescription drugs you need to take - especially those with diabetes or other diseases that require constant monitoring and meds

Insurance papers and important business and family documents

A back-up disk for your computer (back up regularly so you won't lose any

important data, or only a small amount)

Travel kit with toiletries

(called comfort kits)

Change of clothes

Sleeping bags and pillows

Photos and registration papers of horses, and other pets (keep a copy of these in your glove box)

Bottled water - enough for 5-7 days

Power bars or healthy non-perishable snack food

People First Aid Kit - Again, whatever you would normally have in a first aid kit at home including band-aids, ointments and any homeopathic remedies along with aspirin and other analgesics.

Cash - as in the real green-backs. As many have learned the hard way, ATM's do not work if there is no power so you cannot get any money out, nor can you make credit card purchases for gas/fuel or other needed items. Always have a small amount (\$100.00 +) stashed in your wallet or somewhere easily accessible because during an evacuation and disaster money does talk and you may just need to use it for something necessary that you cannot get with electronic cards.

Most of all be prepared, be calm and help your neighbors if you can in the event of evacuation. Get their work numbers and share yours, have a neighborhood phone list with emergency numbers and cell phone numbers. Have a key to your truck and trailer hidden in a safe place that one of your neighbors knows about. If they have time, they can maybe help get your animals out if you aren't there. Have neighborhood

meetings on disaster preparedness. We do, and everyone in our neighborhood has a plan. We have a central staging area, we have emergency supplies and 5,000 gallons of well water storage. We also make sure we have two weeks extra worth of hay stored at all times and enough dry food for at least 8 extra people, just in case - and propane to cook with, candles, matches, and extra batteries.

Your area, be it county, city or state, probably has Disaster Preparedness plans on line or they can mail them to you for more complete information and suggestions. The Red Cross would also be another source for written info to be prepared for a disaster such as fires.

Take care of your horses, cats, dogs and other animals, but more importantly take care of yourself! Get your valuables and get out - your life is not worth trying to save material things that can be replaced - your life cannot, and your family will be devastated! Everything you have is replaceable except your family and your animals!

About the author:

Jessica Lynn is the owner of Earth Song Ranch, a California licensed natural feed supplement business specializing in designing, manufacturing and distributing natural equine, canine and feline nutritional supplements. Earth Song Ranch also offers blends with wild crafted and organic herbs, herbal wormers, homeopathic remedies, nosodes, and educational articles.

Jessica has been involved in holistic and alternative health for humans and animals for well over 4 decades. Jessica breeds Arabian Sport Horses and shares the ranch with her Border Collies and cats! For more information please visit the Earth Song Ranch web site at www.earthsongranch.com.

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