

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Horse safety in emergencies

February 2019

Fire, flood and other emergencies can impact you, your property and your animals at any time. Impacts can limit access to property, compromise utilities such as water and electricity, or leave you isolated or requiring evacuation.

Safety of your animals is your responsibility. Being prepared for emergencies is crucial to a positive outcome for you and your animals.

Are you at risk?

If your property is at risk from bushfires and/or floods you should develop specific plans of action in advance.

Emergency planning information is available from your local NSW RFS brigade, NSW SES unit or council. Neighbours and regional historical records may also help determine if your property is at risk.

Natural disasters, especially severe storms can occur anywhere and with little warning. Everyone should be prepared.

Do not forget agisted horses. Talk with the landholder about risk and establish a plan.

Preparing for the worst

Property emergency plans must include your horses. In an emergency, having a plan will reduce stress, allow clearer thinking and improve the chances of keeping you and your horses safe.

When planning for emergencies consider:

- Are you self-sufficient for at least 3 days?
- Do you have an emergency horse kit?
- Are your horses identifiable?
- Can you relocate your horses quickly? What safe transport options and routes do you have (including backup options)?
- Is there a safe place on your property for your horses if they cannot be relocated?
- Do you have alternative water and power sources?
- Can a neighbour or friend enact your plan when you are not home?

You should practice your plan to test it works and ensure all key friends and family members are aware of it. Timing of practice runs (e.g. different evacuation routes) will provide valuable detail to add to your plans.

Determine triggers. Good planning includes deciding on different triggers that will activate it such as fire danger ratings or flood height predictions.

Identification of horses is important, especially if they become lost. Permanent methods include microchipping, branding and ear tattoos. Temporary or additional methods in an emergency include:

- mobile number written on both sides of the horse using livestock marker, chalk paint or permanent marker
- contact details on silicone or leather tags plaited into hair.

Copies of proof of ownership, a written description including identification features such as markings or brands; microchip details, and photographs in your emergency kit or accessible online will also assist.

Hazard reduction on and around your property is essential. Keeping it well maintained all year round will help mitigate unforeseen events. Local emergency service groups are a source of advice.

Identify and prepare a 'safe' area on your property where horses can be located away from danger as evacuation may not be possible or practical. Ensure they are familiar with being held there. Examples of safe areas can be:

For fire or storm:

- a large heavily grazed paddock or several with internal gates locked open (to allow your horses to escape/run through during a fire), including a dam if possible
- well fenced sand arena (wet down heavily for fire)
- areas with minimal trees or structures that could burn or collapse
- solid concrete/stone/brick building with perimeter firebreak and flammable materials removed (radiant heat exhaustion may be issue if contained for long periods)
- firebreaks and hedging with fire-retardant trees.

For flood:

- high ground or a purpose built **mound** with adequate water and feed supplies/storage
- open areas with limited structures or barbed fencing to get caught in or trapped within.

Emergency kits are essential for the welfare of your horses. They should be stored in a safe and accessible location and be easily transported. They should include:

- feed for at least 3 days, including any special dietary needs
- water, minimum 5-10L/horse in kit (average requirement 30-50L/day/horse)
- halters, leads, rug and other required saddlery
- medications and applicators
- documentation and photographs
- horse first aid kit (ask equine vet for specific details)
- bucket
- wool blankets and towels (burn/ember protection)
- wire cutters and a sharp knife
- torch and batteries
- emergency contact list and maps of area/property.

Access to a veterinarian or other assistance may be limited during an emergency so it is important you have the necessary resources available.

Identify multiple relocation sites with adequate facilities or space and minimal risk, such as with family and friends. Map all routes from your property and have copies in all transport vehicles and emergency kit.

Act early

Whether you have decided to stay or go put your plan into action early to protect your horses. This will give you time to deal with unforeseen problems. Do not wait for emergency warnings – they may come too late.

Animals may behave differently in an emergency, as they can pick up on your stress levels, potentially making them difficult to handle or load. Removing them from danger early will minimise this issue.

As the emergency progresses options can decrease, including ability to leave due to poor visibility or obstructions.

Evacuating your horses

Plan in advance which horse(s) you will evacuate and ensure they are trained for transport. Ensure your transport vehicle is accessible, fuelled, well maintained and stocked with your emergency kit.

Do not risk the safety of yourself, others or your animals by driving, walking or riding through flood waters or active fire-zones. If you cannot access your planned relocation sites, attend an activated evacuation centre (communicated via media) where you will be provided with assistance on safe options for horses.

Horses remaining on the property

- Ensure your emergency kit is in an accessible and known location.
- Remove equipment, such as rugs and halters that contain metal or are flammable or may snag. Be mindful that metal shoes can cause injury if in contact with hot ground.
- Fill all water troughs and any additional containers. Do not rely on automatic systems.
- Place feed in a secure, accessible location. Choose food they will not overeat or cause health issues.
- Never leave horses tethered.
- If a 'safe area' is unavailable, clip or wire open internal gates or cut internal fencing to give horses opportunity to escape danger. Never let horses loose on roads.
- Turn off any power sources that may cause harm e.g. electrical fences, power to buildings

After a natural disaster emergency

- Check for any injuries and seek veterinarian advice or assistance immediately if required.
- Ensure your horses are safely contained, which may require temporary fencing or relocation.
- Ensure adequate food and fresh water is available and not contaminated.
- Buildings impacted by flood or storm damage should be cleaned, aired to dry out and may need to be disinfected.
- Monitor for and treat symptoms of pest or disease.

Be mindful of any hazards that could impact your horses, including hot or boggy ground. If they have been relocated, do not bring them home until the area is safe.

If horses are missing contact your local animal welfare or rescue groups, council or veterinary practice.

Deceased animals require prompt and sanitary disposal. Do a thorough search as soon as possible and dispose of carcasses appropriately. For assistance contact your Local Land Services on 1300 795 299, Department of Primary Industries, NSW SES or NSW RFS.

Use experiences gained from implementing or testing your plan to continually improve it.

More information

NSW Department of Primary Industries – [Community information for floods and bush fires](#)

NSW RFS www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

NSW SES www.ses.nsw.gov.au

[World Animal Protection](#) – Horse disaster pack

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