

I Never Thought it Would Happen to Me...

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"Tornadoes Rip Through the Midwest," "West Nile Races Across the U.S.," "Ice Storm Paralyzes Central Kentucky," "Drought, Wildfires Scorch Western States," "Chemical Spill Forces Evacuation."

News headlines trumpeting natural and man-made disasters have filled the front pages of newspapers at an exceptional rate in 2003, and disaster planning has become this decade's Y2K phrase. Whether you aspire to become a disaster volunteer (and many are needed with a variety of skills) or simply want to be better prepared "just in case," the task begins at home. Suggestions made here will get you started!

How Prepared Are You?

Many horse owners, and the public in general, firmly hold the belief that "it will never happen to me." Emergency managers, on the other hand, have a saying: "It isn't a question of 'if,' but 'when' a disaster will affect you." The majority of disasters that affect horses never hit the nightly news or the daily newspaper. Dramatic rescues with horses dangling from helicopters are rare in comparison to the more commonly occurring disasters caused by barn fires, local flooding, power outages, trailer accidents, and weather-related events.

Consider these situations:

- A winter storm leaves your entire county with an inch of ice on everything. Trees are down, roads are impassable, electricity is out, and the Emergency Operations Center advises all citizens to stay off the roads, which are beyond hazardous. The farm's well water is pumped by electricity, so there is no water supply, you never got around to purchasing a generator, and you are low on hay and grain (the feed supplier was scheduled for tomorrow, but that has been canceled). Grass is buried beneath ice, and horses turned out pick their way lamely through grass icicles. Tree branches fall every five minutes, also posing a danger. Cordless phones don't work without electricity, and the battery charger for your cell phone also depends on household current (you thought the car charger would never be necessary). What do you do?
- A state trooper knocks on your door, advising you to evacuate your home immediately due to a nearby chemical spill. The spill has dangerous vapors and is running into the local creek, which happens to run through your horses' pasture. What do you do?
- News reports show a wildfire headed toward your area, and it is still out of control. Luckily, you have only two horses and a two-horse trailer, plus supplies on hand for three days. Horse/large animal shelters haven't been announced on the radio or television. Where do you go, specifically, besides away from the wildfires?

The scenarios are endless, but those mentioned are very real. Are you prepared to take care of yourself, your family, *and* your animals? Most horse people also have pets that have additional requirements during an evacuation. There certainly is a lot to prepare for *before* the emergency happens.

Risks of Your Area?

A few disaster potentials are universal, such as fires, chemical spills, power outages, disease threats, etc. Others are more common to a specific area, such as tornadoes in Oklahoma (although in the spring of 2003, tornadoes were reported from Virginia to Colorado); hurricanes along the southern and eastern coasts; wildfires in western states; flooding along waterways, etc. Other twists of Mother Nature include earthquake faults, some of which might not be as apparent as the San Andreas fault of California. The New Madrid fault in the Midwest can pack a punch just as strong as the San Andreas fault. An earthquake can cause massive problems from broken water and gas lines and chemical spills to nuclear accidents. By using the suggestions in this article and the resources listed at the end of this article, you can start to prepare your horses, farm, and family for these types of disasters.

Who Goes; Who Stays?

When horse owners have the time necessary to make plans for evacuation (through advanced warning of approaching wildfires or rising flood waters, for example), choices need to be made. If an owner has a two-horse trailer, but owns five horses, which horses will be evacuated first? The sentimental 20-year-old ex-hunter? The expensive broodmare? The promising yearling? The horse which is (or is not) insured? The horses belonging to boarders or the farm?

The time to decide is prior to the emotion and anxiety of facing a disaster head-on. Train all horses to load into a trailer or van during the day and at night, and in a variety of weather conditions (wind, rain, snow, but not lightning, please) so that the chosen evacuees are familiar with the procedures should the real disaster ever occur.

Know your best evacuation route--or preferably routes--and plan your departure early before traffic is heavy. Take an envelope with animal identification information, health records, Coggins test results, and ownership papers with you whether your horses are all being evacuated or not.

How can you safeguard horses left behind? Have them identified. Halters and neck bands can be broken or lost, and they aren't the most reliable identification methods. Microchips, tattoos, and other permanent forms of identification are extremely useful in identifying your horse after a disaster, *if* you have photos or documentation of these with you. Have recent color photos of each horse (four views), and photos of any markings or brands. These will help you prove ownership of one of 25 chestnut horses at a rescue site after a disaster. (See www.TheHorse.com/IDform for a downloadable horse ID form.)

If, for some reason, your horse isn't permanently marked, in a pinch you can always etch your name and contact numbers into horses' hooves (ask your farrier where and how deep), mark them with an orange oil stick used by cattle producers, spray paint a phone number on their sides, etc.

Know Thy Neighbors

Sharing resources, labor, and woes is valuable during a disaster. For a barn fire, you might only need to move your horses to the farm of a neighbor, instead of many miles away, *if* you've discussed this ahead of time and agreed upon arrangements. You might have a generator (and know how to use it) when a neighbor's power is out and he or she needs electricity to run the pump for the well to get water. Chain saws can be a vital tool after wind and ice storms. Get to know your neighbors, since they can be your best asset during trying times.

A Dollar Spent, Many Saved

Disasters are expensive, but being unprepared can be catastrophic. Here's a disaster preparation shopping list:

- + One electrical generator (about \$600 per average household unit);
 - + Gasoline containers;
 - + Fully stocked horse first-aid kit (\$100);
 - + Updated insurance on facilities and possibly horses;
 - + Tree and brush removal from around barns;
 - + Water storage containers;
 - + Three to five days of feed and bedding for each horse;
 - + Cellular phones;
 - + Radios;
 - + Flashlights;
 - + Weather warning radio;
 - + Batteries;
 - + Fire extinguishers; and
 - + Planning, planning, planning!
- = ***EXPENSIVE!***

Disaster preparedness doesn't happen overnight, but over a period of time. Take the ideas from your "homework" assignment on page 75 to get started, and notice that many preparatory measures are free, but take time and effort. Individuals should also have \$300 in cash (denominations of \$20 and less, plus change) on hand should an immediate evacuation need to take place. In severe disasters, checks and credit cards might not be accepted by vendors, and ATMs could be without power.

All this expense for what? Consider the situation where a driver runs a car through your pasture fence, hitting and killing a horse. Two other horses escape out on the road, where another driver avoids hitting one, but downs an electrical pole, which has a major electrical transformer. Assuming that no drivers are injured and authorities have been called, you immediately notify neighbors with the emergency phone list you have in the house. Neighbors assist in capturing

your horses-at-large, and catch and stable the other horses in the field. The electricity is out, so you start your generator to keep the well water flowing to your barn and automatic waterers in the fields. Friends down the road have two metal gates that close the gap in the fencing so that horses can be turned out the next day. Having adequate insurance will save you thousands of dollars in case things don't go well, but a little planning can go a long way.

Want to Become More Involved?

First, volunteers must have their own disaster plan in place. Learn as much about disaster response as possible, and contact your local city or county emergency management officials for volunteer opportunities in your area. Check with your state horse council or state emergency management office to determine if they have a disaster plan for animals in place. In major disasters, volunteers need to be part of a recognized organization that has been called into action--just showing up might well get you turned away.

Contact the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters for a local chapter (www.nvoad.org). Should you be called upon to respond in a disaster situation, and you are a registered volunteer, remember you will have to take supplies to maintain yourself (three to five days of water, food, clothing, medicine, personal hygiene items, sleeping gear, etc.). Otherwise volunteers might become part of the problem by further draining local resources.

Volunteers of any type should be prepared to do the not-so-glamorous jobs (inventory of feed and medical supplies, cleaning stalls, answering telephones, directing traffic, filing paperwork), since everyone needs to pitch in during a disaster.

The time to prepare is now. Do your homework.

WHAT ABOUT THE PETS?

Horse people almost always come with dogs and cats, and often other "four-legged family members." Disaster planning information for small animals can be found at the American Veterinary Medical Association site at www.avma.org/disaster/savingfamily.aspx and at the Humane Society for the United States site at www.hsus.org/ace/18732.

--*Roberta Dwyer, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVPM*

PREPARING FOR DISASTER

Do Your Homework

Like all work that seems overwhelming, it is best to start off with a list of tasks and a goal of when each will be completed. Here is some homework that will help you become better prepared for a disaster. Your deadline is to have this completed in six months.

- I know, and have educated family members and employees, on how to shut off the gas, water, and electricity to the barns and home.
- If I have well water supplied by an electric pump, I have purchased an adequately sized generator to use should the power be interrupted.
- I have educated myself and other key people on how to use the generator in case of emergency, and have actually practiced turning it on.
- I have a list of emergency numbers placed by telephones in the house and barn areas.
- I have prepared a mobile first-aid kit for my horses, pets, and family should we need to evacuate.
- I have practiced loading the horses to be evacuated into the trailer under different weather conditions and times of day/night.
- I have detailed photographs, proof of ownership, and health papers on my horses (and pets) stored with my emergency kit.
- I have identified several locations where I can take horses in an evacuation situation, and I have personally made contact with each.
- I have contacted neighbors or trusted friends to check on my animals should I be away when a disaster strikes.
- I have visited with my insurance agent to ensure I have adequate coverage for natural and man-made disasters that might affect my farm and animals.
- I have a plan on how to attach identifying marks on my horses for recovery identification should I need to evacuate without them.
- I have made a disaster plan with the help of my veterinarian and have educated my family and employees about the plan. --*Roberta Dwyer, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVPM*

USDA AND HSUS PARTNER FOR DISASTER

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced the signing of a "Memorandum of Understanding" on May 22, 2003, with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to coordinate disaster preparedness and response efforts for animals.

"This agreement is an opportunity for APHIS to continue its cooperative relationship with HSUS and establish disaster response standards," said Chester A. Gipson, APHIS' deputy administrator for animal care. "Animals are often the forgotten victims in disaster situations, and effective response standards will ensure animals' suffering is quickly minimized."

APHIS and HSUS' partnership will include the exchange of information during a disaster, joint conferences, disaster planning exercises, and collaborative work between both groups on projects, operational procedures, equipment, and training. The agreement will also promote standards for animal preparedness to the public, businesses, disaster organizations, and emergency managers.

APHIS is an action-oriented agency that works with other federal agencies, Congress, states, agricultural and animal interest groups, and the general public to protect the health and value of

American agriculture and natural resources. APHIS' animal care program enforces the Animal Welfare Act, which establishes minimum standards of humane animal care and treatment for animals used in research or exhibition, sold as pets at the wholesale level, or transported in commerce. HSUS is the nation's largest animal protection organization, with over seven million members and constituents.

Explore the power of the human-horse connection as you travel the emotional journey that veterinarians at Rood and Riddle Equine Hospital and owners embark on when a beloved horse becomes ill in [Equine ER](#)

For further information regarding the "Memorandum of Understanding," please contact Darby G. Holladay, USDA, APHIS, 4700 River Road, Unit 84, Riverdale, Md. 20737; (301) 734-3265; ace@usda.gov ; www.aphis.usda.gov.--*USDA APHIS*

VOLUNTEER WORK: Get Educated!

Want to learn more so you can become a volunteer in a disaster? While there are many independent study courses available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), three are particularly good starting points: Animals in Disasters Modules A and B, and Basic Incident Command System (for those who are serious about getting involved). The Basic Incident Command System course helps people understand how all first responders "talk the same talk" in order to make order out of chaos. It also explains the chain of command and where each responder fits into the system. These courses take an average of 12-20 hours, and must be completed within one year. New in 2003 is also the "Livestock in Disasters" course. College credit is available. See FEMA Independent Study at www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS.--
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