

Firewise Education – for Horse and Small Acreage Livestock Owners



Wildfires can quickly become a real threat to rural landowners. It's easy to think fires only happen to other people, but this kind of thinking can lead to tragic consequences. When horses or livestock are involved, action needs to be taken quickly to save the lives of your animals and reduce property damage. Being proactive is the safest plan.

Fires can come from different sources; from barn fires, to hazardous materials spills, to wildfire—all of which may require evacuation. When living in a dry, desert climate, it is imperative to be prepared to move your horses to a safe area. Fire travels rapidly, especially when there's a high wind.

If a wildfire breaks out in your area, decide early on whether you need to leave. Late evacuation is a deadly option, risking loss of lives and property. If you are unprepared or wait until the last minute to evacuate, you could be told by emergency officials to leave your horses behind. Once you leave your property, you have no way of knowing how long you will be kept out of the area. If left behind, your horses could be unattended for days without care, food or water. If you decide to stay and actively defend your property from fire, be aware of the risks.

Everyone's situation differs according to the size and nature of their horse enterprise. That's why every horse owner needs to develop an individual evacuation plan before hot weather and fire season arrive. Use this checklist of information and suggestions to help you organize your firewise plan for emergencies.

CONSIDERATION	ACTION	COMMENTS	ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
How to stay current on dangerous fire situations	Stay tuned to your local news media for fire coverage and safest evacuation routes.	Monitor weather forecasts, media broadcasts and local community radio stations for emergency information	

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When to leave -- decide early and quickly	Be prepared to evacuate when advised by local authorities.	Late evacuation is a deadly option. Waiting to start planning until an evacuation is ordered will delay your safe evacuation and possibly exposes you to other risks. Once the fire is close, visibility may be poor and travel hazardous. Fallen trees, power lines, abandoned cars and firefighting vehicles can easily block roads. Even quiet horses may panic in a trailer filled with smoke or surrounded by sirens.	
Pay attention!	Watch weather conditions and fire behavior. Be alert for a sudden change in wind direction or speed, a dramatic change in air temperature or humidity or smoke and ash or burning embers dropping around you.		
When fire strikes	<p>Remain calm and alert, think clearly and act decisively.</p> <p>Maintain good communications with the people you're working with; give clear instructions and make sure they are understood.</p> <p>Cooperate with firefighters and other emergency services.</p>	<p>In some cases you will not receive any official warning that a fire is coming.</p> <p>Your safety and the safety of others as well as that of emergency personnel may be put at risk if you don't evacuate when told to.</p>	
Open property access for emergency officials	Have extra keys on hand to paddocks, gates, perimeter fencing.		
What to save first	Pre-determine your priorities: a structure, animals, machinery or feed.		
Animals might refuse to leave, others might	Close gates that give livestock access to dangerous or soon-to-be	Decide in advance which horses you will evacuate and make sure they are	

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run back into a burning building	dangerous areas.	suitably trained for transport.	
	Have equipment and experienced handlers move livestock	If there is no time to evacuate, as a last resort release animals into the largest fenced areas possible.	
	Have a planned evacuation route for every stall in the barn.		
Fire-safe gear for horses	Remove all synthetics from horse such as nylon halters, blankets, sheets and fly masks.	Leather halters and cotton lead ropes will be safer because they are less likely to melt than synthetics.	
Where to take your horses during an emergency?	Pre-determine locations to take your horse(s) should a fire arise	Options: a friend or family member's horse property, stockyard or sales yard, fairgrounds, show grounds, racetrack or a large park.	Contact your veterinarian, state department of agriculture, agricultural extension office or local emergency management authorities for information about shelters in your area.
No trailer or not enough trailer space for all your horses?	If you do not have your own trailer or do not have enough trailer space for all of your horses, make arrangements ahead of time with friends or family to be available to trailer your horses.	Notify those who have agreed to assist as soon as possible so enough help is available.	
Driving routes	Plan several possible driving routes in case normal routes are blocked.	Review and update regularly. Be aware of any changes in policies for your designated evacuation route.	
What to take with you	Keep an animal emergency supply kit stocked and ready to take with you, along with food and water for your horse(s).	Prepare this ahead of time	
	All belongings should be marked	Prepare ahead of time.	

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	with your name or other identification.		
Last resort for structures	Activate sprinkler system for house, barn and structures		
	Shut off power and gas; turn off electric fencing	Know what needs to be done to prevent potential explosions or sparks from creating more fire.	
If you can't evacuate horses or livestock	Place horses in a Firesafe Area when evacuation is not possible or practical	Firesafe Area: identify this area ahead of time. This area should be as large as possible--a sand arena, a large dry lot turnout or an overgrazed field. Fencing should be fire-proof (metal panels or wire with concrete posts). The bigger the area the better. Put water and feed in the center in (metal) containers that won't burn or melt.	No trees, wood posts, dried vegetation or other flammables nearby that will readily burn. Most horses can cope on their own if there's enough open space to move around in.
	If possible, before releasing horses into a Firesafe Area, soak them with water, especially manes and tails. This may help protect a horse from serious burns, but only for a very short time.	Past experience shows most horses will suffer minimal burns if given maximum space. They will gallop through flames or around the edges to stand on the blackened, previously burnt areas until fire has passed.	
	Fill troughs, baths, sinks and metal buckets with reserve water for later use.		
Horse handling tips	A fractious, nervous horse may calm down if temporarily blindfolded		
	Do not shut horses in stables or small yards.		
	Never turn horses out on the road where they will be in danger from		

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	traffic and fire, or where they can cause an accident, leaving you legally responsible		
Identify Your Horses	Permanently identified horses (microchipped, branded or identified by a drawing/photo, which includes markings) will help reunite horses with owners if separation occurs. Be prepared to 'paint' your name and phone number on the horse using livestock grease crayons (the ones used to number horses in endurance rides.) You can braid an ID tag into their mane or use a permanent marker to write your cell# on a white hoof. Neckbands, hip stickers and identification tags on leather halters may also be useful.		
Handlers should wear fire-safe attire	<p>In the event that a fire threatens, whether you decide to evacuate or stay, the right clothes can help shield you from radiant heat, burning embers and flames.</p> <p>Cotton (or wool) fabrics are essential. Synthetics can melt, causing serious burns.</p> <p>Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt with sleeves down and a wide-brimmed hat.</p> <p>Sturdy leather gloves protect hands from radiant heat.</p> <p>Leather boots with a good tread are</p>	Condition your horse to your strange appearance ahead of time	

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	<p>a safe choice. Tennis shoes, rubber boots or other synthetic footwear may melt.</p> <p>A cotton scarf or bandana 'bandit-style' will shield your nose and face from the effects of smoke and ash.</p> <p>Goggles help protect eyes from smoke and burning embers.</p>		
Last resort	<p>When the main fire-front is upon you there is little else that can be done so protect yourself from the effects of radiant heat actively monitor the fire. Do not put your own life in additional danger.</p>		
Just do it!	<p>Research shows that individuals who don't begin Firewise planning within the next 24 hours are unlikely to ever make any changes.</p>		