

Equine Emergency Evacuation: Are You Ready?

With on-going drought, our wildfire conditions in New Mexico should be of concern to equine owners. The need to evacuate, with limited notification, can create a situation of panic for both you and your equine(s). If authorities recommend evacuation for your area, do not wait. Take action early and be decisive. Some basic preparations now can help to ensure a safe evacuation should the need arise.

Prepare an emergency plan specific to your situation and your equine(s). This should include predetermined holding facilities where you can house your equine(s) for at least 72 hours. If you are unprepared, or wait too long, authorities may insist you leave your animals behind, or not allow you back in to retrieve them, once you leave the property.

When conditions become threatening, confine your animals so you can leave with them quickly, if necessary. Do not abandon them, or turn them loose. Do not leave them tied or locked in buildings or cages from which they can not escape.

Do not count on others to rescue your equine(s). Emergency evacuation is important for all animals on your property, but equines require extra time because of their size and unique transportation needs. Many equine panic at the smell of smoke and may become difficult to control and/or load into a trailer.

Become familiar with the type of disasters/emergencies that could occur in your area. Develop a plan and share it with family, willing neighbors and friends. Post emergency contact information in your barn/stable/feed room. Keep in mind that many disasters cause power outages and cell phone towers become overloaded. You may not be able to contact family/friends until you are out of the area.

Keep copies of important papers with your emergency plan. These should include your transport papers, vaccination records, current photos of your equine(s), types of medications, your veterinarian contact information, and any special medical and/or feeding requirements. Halter ID tags, and/or microchips are recommended. If someone else is transporting your animal(s), have them use a livestock marker or large "sharpie" pen, to write your name and phone number directly on the animal's body.

Keep your trailer in good working condition and parked where it can be reached for safe, fast hook-up and loading. Make sure your equine(s) will load. Have extra halters, lead ropes, water buckets and first aid supplies ready to take with you. Whenever possible, have someone travel with you to assist with your animals. If you do not have a trailer, make arrangements, in advance, with someone who does, and can assist in emergencies.

Prepare a "disaster kit" and keep it ready to go. Customize it to you and your equine's needs. Some suggested items: water & feed buckets/tubs, hoof pick, extra halter & lead, flashlight/headlamp, first aid kits (human & animal), medical records and proof of ownership, knife, wire/fence cutters, extra cotton rope, extra jacket, gloves/raincoat, and emergency contact numbers.

Once you have secured your equine(s) in a safe location, contact the necessary people to let them know of your situation. The New Mexico Livestock Board is in charge of large animals during disasters. You can contact them, 505-841-6161 for additional resources while preparing your emergency plan and during the disaster. Follow local news reports for other potential danger areas to avoid, while evacuating.

Be careful when returning to your property after the disaster. Downed power lines, fallen trees and other debris, along with contaminated water could present real danger as well as lingering smoke. The presence of emergency vehicles and aircraft can add additional stress to animals. Hold animals off site until the emergency is over.

