

Disaster Evacuation Preparation for Horse Owners

Our topics for this week are:

- **Preparations for a stay-in-place disaster**
- **Plans for evacuating horses in times of disasters**

The effects of global warming are causing more frequent disasters that affect animal owners. Protection of house pets is a big problem if faced with a fire, flood, or hurricane, but if you own livestock it can be a huge problem. Today, we will recommend preparations for horse owners to evacuate their horses during disasters.

Prepare to Stay in Place or Transport

To prepare for short-term disasters without mandatory evacuation or if evacuation has become impossible due to impassible roadways, you should be constantly vigilant in the maintenance of your barns and sheds so that they remain in good shape to possibly withstand storms and avoid fires. Sufficient water and food should always be present to maintain your horses for a couple of weeks.

To prepare for a disaster-prudent or mandatory evacuation, all horses should be trained to load in trailers without hesitation. This requires calm, small steps, basic training and monthly rehearsals.

Prepare Identification Systems

Second, all horses should have individual identifiers. During an evacuation, you may have to leave them with strangers or in dire circumstances when you cannot transport them to safety you may have to free them. Ideally, each horse should have an external and an internal form of ID. Photographs of the horse's haircoat markings can be sufficient for an external ID. Lip tattoos are also effective and required for race track horses. ID information can be attached to a halter, but this method should not be relied on since halters can be lost, switched to other horses, and if the horse must be set free, it should be naked. Halters and other tack may become caught on trees, buildings, or fences entrapping or injuring the horse. Nylon halters can melt into the skin during fires.

The most common internal ID method is microchipping. Microchips, about the size of a grain of rice, can be injected into the ligament on the top of the horse's neck. The microchips contain an ID number that can be read by a hand scanner. The number can be registered with the microchip

company and the horse's breed registry. Another means of internal ID is iris scans. Each horse has a unique pattern in their iris and nothing has to be injected into its body.

Find a Remote Safe Haven

Third, you should find a distant safe haven, a stable, farm, or ranch that will agree to board your horses, if needed, during a disaster. The safe haven should have health requirements for your horses, including vaccinations and negative Coggin's test. A water-proof binder containing vital information to give a safe haven care-giver in an emergency evacuation should be maintained. The binder should include records of vaccinations and the most recent Coggin's test as well as all ID information for each horse. Special handling advice and needed medication information should also be included. If the medications are prescription drugs, they should be included in the binder at the time of evacuation.

Be Ready for Evacuation and Leave Early

Fourth, you should maintain your horse trailers and tow vehicles in roadworthy condition on a moment's notice. It is best to have a contingency plan for your horses' transport if you do not have trailer space for all of them or if an unexpected failure in your trailer's road worthiness occurs. This may include an agreement with a horse transport company or a horse-owning neighbor with extra trailer space. Never sedate a horse prior to being trailered because they may be unable to maintain their balance in a moving trailer.

At the first notice of a possible disaster, monitor the news and weather closely. In regional mandatory evacuations, evacuation routes can be a problem. Roads you planned to use may be blocked by the fire, flood, or massive traffic. Plan alternative routes, but the best option is to evacuate early. Don't wait for mandatory evacuation orders. Not only will this be the safest option for you and your horses, it will allow you time to concentrate on other priorities or helping others who need to evacuate.

Review your evacuation plan and update your horse information binders at least once per year. Instruct or remind all who may be involved in a disaster evacuation of your horses of the plans. In some cases, practice drills may be needed.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Practice trailer loading your horses on a regular basis**
- 2. Keep trailers and towing vehicles road-ready**

- 3. Have two means for others to identify your horses**
- 4. Make prior arrangements for a distant, safe haven in case of disaster**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and can be found on Amazon as well as from other book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 100 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.