

20 Disaster Planning Questions

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Community disaster planning begins with understanding your farm and community's risk for wildfires, storm outbreaks, hurricanes, earthquakes, and chemical mishaps.

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In fall 2005 life in south Louisiana changed forever. The hurricanes that year took many lives, both human and animal. Three years later another severe storm season ravaged the state, although this time communities had pulled together to develop functional disaster plans ahead of time that accounted for pets, horses, and other agriculture animals and, thus, saved lives. Last year marks one of the worst in the world in terms of natural and man-made disasters--the earthquakes, tsunami, and nuclear reactor crisis in Japan; floods in Australia; earthquakes in New Zealand; wildfires, massive flooding, and tornadoes across the United States. Even though planning for events such as the tornadoes that wiped out towns in Alabama, Missouri, Indiana, and Kentucky are impossible to prepare for completely, the aftermath response, recovery, and restoration of these communities or any community affected by a disaster will be far better--and the road to recovery much quicker—if planning and forethought precede these scenarios.

Community disaster planning begins at home and in neighborhoods. It begins with understanding your farm and community's risk for wildfires, storm outbreaks, hurricanes, earthquakes, and chemical mishaps. Equally as important is community networking functionality. Families and communities must be able to identify their local resources, because disaster response begins locally. Well-prepared horse owners should be able to answer these questions:

- 1) Do I have contact information for local equine veterinarians, agricultural extension agents, animal control officers, and local emergency manager(s)--those experts or officials who might be able to provide assistance in an emergency?
- 2) Who has functional trucks/horse trailers in my area if an evacuation is ordered?

- 3) Do I have a working battery-operated NOAA radio or television so I can keep up with weather alerts, traffic information, or other important disaster-related news?
- 4) Do I have enough cash, flashlights, food, and batteries for me and my family (including my horses) in an emergency?
- 5) Where should I evacuate my horses to?
- 6) Are my horses' Coggins tests up-to-date, and do I have available copies?
- 7) If I own stallions, will the evacuation site admit them?
- 8) What is the route to the evacuation site, and what if traffic contraflow is already in effect (many times stock trailers are not allowed on the road when a city or state has ordered contraflow).
- 9) Does my horse load and trailer well? How will I handle this if he doesn't?
- 10) What if I forget my horse's medication for a pre-existing condition?
- 11) If electing to leave horses at home, who will take care of them if I am not allowed to return for days or weeks?
- 12) Do I have neighbors' contact information, and do they have mine? What is a secondary form of communication if cell phones and power utilities are not functional?
- 13) Does my horse have a tattoo or microchip, and is it registered so the tracking information can be used in the event of loss? What if well-meaning people rescue my horse but he doesn't have a temporary/permanent and readable form of identification?
- 14) Is my horse up-to-date on vaccinations to help him stay healthy during stressful events?
- 15) If I have to leave my horse at home when I evacuate, should I leave him in the barn or turn him out?
- 16) How would I deal with downed electrical poles and pasture fences? Do I have tools to remove dangerous storm debris from the pasture and stable area?
- 17) Do I have ample feed, hay, and a safe water supply for my horses if I can't get out for several days?
- 18) Do I have both human and animal first-aid kits for emergency situations?
- 19) Do I have a plan for contacting a family member or close friend outside of my area as to my family's and horses' safety status?
- 20) What local or regional resources (such as a state or community animal response team) are available to help me make a plan that includes my horses?