

Disaster Plan

Your Plan for Catastrophic Weather Events

By Georgia Andrews

Catastrophic weather events have been on the rise in recent years, and it could be just a matter of time before your area is struck with a disaster. The Mid-Atlantic region may fall victim to tornados, floods, electrical storms, ice storms, earthquakes or even fires. Regardless of where you live, the key to successfully riding out a catastrophic weather event is preparedness.

A good disaster plan is vital to keeping yourself and your animal companions safe. But horses require extra consideration because of their size and specific transportation needs. Since you won't have much time to think or act during an emergency, take time now to create an effective emergency plan. Critical to any plan is being able to identify your horse, making certain they are up to date on all vaccinations, and being able to prove ownership.

Identifying Your Horse



There are several ways to make your horses easier to identify in the event you become separated.

- Halter tag—Attach a luggage tag or any other tag to the halter of the horse. Write your contact information on the tag and the horse's special needs, if any. Sometimes horses lose their halters, so it is always a good idea to have the owner's information vested on several parts of the horse, just to be sure that at least one will endure past the disaster.
- Neck collars—These are sturdy plastic collars generally used in broodmare operations. You can write your information on these collars.
- Leg band—These are bands securely vested around the pastern of the horse.
- Tail-Tag—Put your information on a tag, and braid into the tail or mane.
- Clipper-shaved information in the animal's coat —Shave off your phone number on the horse's coat.
- Livestock-marking crayon (non-toxic, non-water-soluble)—Use it to write your information on the horse's coat.
- Permanent marker to mark hooves— These marks allow you to identify your horse more easily in a rescue facility by the color of its hooves. These markings give you the advantage of saying upfront, "My horse has blue (or whatever color) hooves." You can also use permanent marker to write your information on the hoof of your horse.

Vaccinations

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) considers certain vaccinations as part of its core vaccinations. As such, these need to be part of every horse's annual vaccination schedule. They are tetanus, eastern and western equine encephalomyelitis, West Nile virus, and rabies.

Regarding tetanus, the great majority of tetanus cases occur due to a puncture wound, although many times no one can find a wound. When disaster happens, there debris including metal parts and nails, greatly increasing the chance of your horse getting injured by a puncture wound. Therefore, you need to keep your horse's tetanus vaccine up-to-date. Eastern and western equine encephalomyelitis and West Nile virus diseases are examples of vector-borne diseases, meaning they are spread by mosquitoes. These diseases affect not only horses but humans as well. Mosquitoes reproduce in water. In case of floods and storms, the surface water accumulation will be increased, and the chance for spreading these diseases will be intensified.



Evacuation

If you must evacuate, it is imperative that you are prepared to move your horses to a safe area. Remember, during an emergency, the time you have to evacuate your horses will be limited. With an effective emergency plan, you may have enough time to move your horses to safety.

- If you do not have your own trailer, or do not have enough trailer space for all of your horses, be sure you have several people on standby to help evacuate your horses.
- Know where you can take your horses in an emergency evacuation. Make arrangements with a friend or another horse owner to stable your horses if needed.
- Contact your local animal care and control agency, agricultural extension agent, or local emergency management authorities for information about shelters in your area.
- Inform friends and neighbors of your evacuation plans. Post detailed instructions in several places— including the barn office or tack room, the horse trailer, and barn entrances—to ensure they are accessible to emergency workers in case you are not able to evacuate your horses yourself.
- Place your horses' Coggins tests, veterinary papers, identification photographs, and vital information— such as medical history, allergies, and emergency telephone numbers (veterinarian, family members, etc.)—in a watertight envelope. Store the envelope with your other important papers in a safe place that can be quickly reached.
- If your horses are unaccustomed to being loaded onto a trailer, practice the procedure so they become used to it.



Not every weather event will be a disaster. During inclement weather, there is always one question that horse owners have: Should we leave the horses in the barn or put them out at pasture? This decision is entirely up to you; however, you should use common sense. Things to consider are:

- Barn structure—How old is the barn? Is its structure solid? Even a solid structure may not withstand a strong wind, so you may want to consider putting your horses out at pasture before the inclement weather. You will need enough safe area and good fences to keep your horses safe and confined.
- Trees and power lines surrounding the barn—If there are trees or power lines near or over the barn that could fall on the barn and cause fire, you may want to put your horses out.
- Storms—If out at pasture during a thunderstorm or an electrical storm, you and/or your horse could be struck by lightning.
- Overcrowding—Horses may get very agitated during inclement weather, and you may not want to put many horses in small acreage. Dominance issues can add to the stress of the weather and may cause horses to go through fences and injure themselves or get loose on roads and cause accidents.
- Floods—Horses are better off outside where they can get to higher ground. Horses trapped in barns during floods will drown.
- Your horses and their comfort, is your horse more or less likely to be stressed in the barn?

Planning and Preparation

- Feed—Have at least two weeks supply of feed/hay in a dry area. If you end up stranded on your property, for example in a flood, your horse will have enough to eat until the situation is back to normal. If you are stranded in your house, surrounded by water, your horse should have access to hay, as it is not safe for people to wander around in flood waters.
- Water—Fill plastic trash cans with water, secure the lids, and store safely. You can have clean water for your horses in case a water line is broken, the water source becomes contaminated, or you have no electricity to run a pump.
- Emergency care kit (in a waterproof container)—Include medications, salves, ointments, vet wrap, bandages, tape, povidone-iodine, halter, lead rope, etc. With an emergency care kit or first-aid kit, you will be prepared to treat your horse for minor injuries until things normalize.
- Emergency barn kit—Include a chain saw and fuel, hammers and nails, saw, fencing materials, emergency fencing, etc. Also, keep an ample supply of flashlights and batteries on hand. Learn how to operate any power tools in advance so you can operate them safely. Think about what you would need to do to clean out areas, reach your horses in a damaged barn, or put fences back up. Enter damaged buildings only if you can do so safely. Remember your safety is paramount.
- Power source—Consider having a generator and fuel to run it. This is especially important if you own a boarding facility. Your customers will expect you to be prepared to continually care for their horses.

After the Storm

- Be very careful when venturing outside. Live electric wires could be all around you.
- Metal debris will likely be everywhere, and you need to be careful so neither you nor your horses get injured.
- Carefully try to clean debris from the barn, and clear the driveway out to the road.
- In floods, snakes will seek high ground. Do not put your hands or feet in recesses you cannot see. Snakes will also hide between hay bales and banked shavings.
- Check fences to ensure that they are intact.
- Dispose of wet hay from pasture and barns as spoiled hay may be a source of botulism.