



# PALO ALTO HUMANE SOCIETY

*Helping animals through intervention, education, advocacy*

## DISASTER PLANNING FOR YOUR HORSES

Are you ready if a disaster strikes your farm? What will you do with your horses? Your best defense against any emergency is to be prepared!

Your first priority is human safety. Horses can't take care of themselves, so people must be kept safe so they're able to help the animals.

### Preparing your farm

- Learn which types of disasters can occur in your area and develop a specific plan of action for each one. Each situation will require different methods of preparation, evacuation, and sheltering.
- Assemble an emergency disaster kit for your farm. Keep disaster supplies in covered, waterproof containers, in an easily accessible spot. Use these supplies only in an emergency. Include:
  - One-week supply of food and water (5–10 gallons per day) for each horse. Refresh food and water frequently to ensure that it hasn't become stale or contaminated.
  - Three-day supply of food and water for each employee
  - Animal first aid kit and first aid book
  - Leather or cotton halter and lead for each horse (nylon can melt in a fire)
  - Flashlight and portable radio, plus extra batteries
  - Buckets for food and water
  - Blindfolds or bandanas
  - Firefighting supplies: fire extinguishers, shovel, rake, long hoses, buckets, ladder, and wheelbarrow
  - Identification photos (head, side, front, and back views) and medical records of each horse (if possible). Keep copies in a fireproof box, off site, or both.

- Rope (or wire and wire cutters), gloves, wrenches for turning off gas and water valves, and any other tools you may need
- Blankets or sheets
- A change of clothing for employees

- Make a diagram of your barn and property, including the locations of:
  - All exits
  - Shut-off points for water, gas, and electricity
  - Stored emergency supplies
  - Fire-fighting equipment
  - Safety zones
  - Trailers

Post the diagram along with emergency phone numbers at each entrance and in all tack and feed rooms.

- Designate safe areas to evacuate horses for each type of disaster: high ground for floods, open areas for earthquakes, etc. In a wildfire or flood, your entire farm may be threatened, so you'll need to choose an alternate evacuation area several miles away. Contact local stables, fairgrounds, and racetracks about the availability of emergency shelter.



- Find or create several alternative water sources on your property. Fires use a lot of water, earthquakes can break water lines, and water can become contaminated in a flood. Use storage tanks and water troughs, and prepare a way of obtaining water from running streams.
- Reduce fire hazards in and around your barn(s)
  - Enforce your “no smoking” rules.
  - Store gasoline, paints, solvents, and other flammables in a separate area.
  - Store hay, straw, shavings, manure, and wood away from barn.
  - Clear vegetation for at least 50 feet around all buildings. Prune overhanging trees.
  - Clean gutters and roofs regularly.
- Identify your horses with freeze marking, branding, tattoos, ear tags, or microchips. Store copies of their medical records, papers, and photographs with your emergency supplies.
- Maintain trucks and trailers in good condition and make sure they’re available at all times.
- Practice getting your horses out of their stalls or corrals and into a trailer quickly and calmly. Horses in a panic will often not want to leave their stall or corral. Accustom them to seeing you in a raincoat and bandanna mask. Practice blindfolding them, and using different methods of restraint.

## Preparing your people

- Familiarize everyone who works on the farm with your emergency procedures and location of emergency equipment. Focus on how to handle animals in an emergency, particularly those with special needs (stallions, pregnant mares, etc.).
- Inform all horse owners and employees about your safety rules and evacuation plans. Hold disaster drills and practice emergency procedures.
- Form a neighborhood group to watch out for each other and help in an emergency. Teach your neighbors about your farm’s procedures and animals, and learn about theirs.
- Identify at least two escape routes from your farm. Some roads may be blocked.
- Consider buying a gas generator to run water pumps and emergency equipment.
- Have all employees trained in first aid and CPR.
- Work with your local fire department and sheriff’s office to develop an appropriate and effective emergency plan for your farm. Ask them to make yearly inspections of fire extinguishers and storage of combustibles.



## When disaster strikes

- Stay calm and follow your plan. Horses in danger can panic and be difficult to handle.
- Evacuate early. As the disaster worsens, roads may become blocked with traffic and emergency vehicles.
- When evacuating multiple horses, take advantage of their herd instincts. Lead one, and the others will follow.
- If appropriate, sedate your horse before evacuating it. Although sedation can make a horse more tractable, it can also decrease the animal's sense of self-preservation. Whether to sedate is a decision you should make based on your horse's temperament, what type of sedation you have available, and who's handling the horse. Discuss this with your veterinarian beforehand so that you can have appropriate supplies available if needed.
- Put identification on each horse. Write your name and phone number on halters and blankets, and/or paint your driver's license number or phone number on your horse's side.
- Listen to your radio for news and announcements of temporary housing for animals.
- Take other actions as described below for each type of disaster.

### Barn fire

- Do not enter a building that is already burning. Smoke inhalation can kill you.
- Blindfold each horse with a wet towel or rag, cover its nostrils with a wet cloth, and wet its mane and tail.
- Put a halter (cotton or leather) on each horse and lead it to a safe area. Do not blanket your horse; the blanket may catch fire.
- Close the barn doors after you have removed all your animals. Otherwise, they may try to return to the barn and become trapped inside.

### Wildfire

- If you are caught in the open, go to bare or rocky areas. Don't try to outrun a fire!
- Let horses with you run loose. They will have a better chance to find safety.
- If a fire is approaching your farm, load your horses and evacuate early to a safe place away from the fire. Don't hesitate; fires move quickly.

### Earthquake

- Remember to stop, drop, and hold.
- Reassure your horses, as they will be frightened.
- Do not enter buildings that may be damaged.
- If a horse is trapped or injured, contact emergency personnel immediately.
- Be prepared for aftershocks.

### Flood

- At the first sign of rising waters, move horses, feed, and water supplies to higher ground. Act quickly, as flood waters can rapidly inundate an area and eliminate escape routes.



## If you must leave your horses behind

- Leave your horses in a safe, enclosed area, such as a corral or pasture with no barbed wire. Do not let them loose to fend for themselves unless your property is enclosed, or unless a wildfire threatens the area. Loose animals on the road can be injured, and can create a hazard for evacuating motorists.
- Put enough food (hay, not grain) and water out for at least 48 hours, in non-spill containers.
- Post a sign for rescue workers noting the number of horses left.
- Leave extra food in a safe place accessible to rescuers but not to animals.
- Return to check on your horses as soon as emergency relief workers deem it safe.

## Lost and found

- If you lose a horse:
  - Check all local shelters, veterinarians, and emergency animal holding facilities. Provide them with a complete description of your horse, including photos.
  - Post flyers in your neighborhood, and place ads in local newspapers.
  - Keep searching! Horses will be frightened and disoriented, and may wander away from instead of towards their home.
- If you find a horse:
  - Contact local shelters, veterinarians, and animal holding facilities with a complete description of the horse (including a photo, if possible).
  - Post flyers and place advertisements in newspapers.

## Other actions you can take

- Organize or get involved with a neighborhood rescue group.
- Join a rescue group to learn disaster rescue techniques.
- Help organize safe holding facilities such as fairgrounds, farms, and racetracks for use in an emergency.
- Lobby for veterinary representation in state and federal departments of agriculture to help design effective disaster response plans for large animals.

