

Fire safety

Tips for evacuating families and farm animals

Planning is key when it comes to evacuation, particularly when large animals are involved. Experts recommend that farm and ranch owners make emergency and evacuation plans a part of the strategic plan for their businesses.

Barn smart

- Store combustibles properly. Check that barns have working fire extinguishers as well as firefighting tools like shovels, hoes, rakes and buckets.
- Store enough livestock feed to last a week and ensure safe storage procedures.
- Horses drink 5 to 15 gallons of water a day. Be sure there's at least a three-day supply.
- Keep recent pictures of horses and make at least 10 copies to distribute as "lost" flyers in case disaster prevents orderly evacuation.
- Write the animal owner's name, address and phone number on all tack and equipment in case of separation in a disaster.
- Microchip your horses.

Emergency water

- Experts recommend a minimum stored water supply of 2,500 gallons in ponds, pools or tanks.
- Review fence configurations to ensure easy access to stored water by firefighters and emergency personnel without compromising livestock security.
- If water comes from a well, consider an emergency generator to operate the pump during power failures.
- Keep a supply of large, heavy-duty garbage cans to haul emergency water to livestock, if necessary.
- Make sure corrals are secure, gates are in good working order and chutes are prepared to handle rapid loading.

Before you evacuate

- Check with fairgrounds, horse show areas, racetracks, ranches with large, irrigated pastures and railroad holding yards to see if they're willing to temporarily house horses and cattle.
- Ask feed suppliers about procedures for supplying emergency feed and water.
- Keep emergency livestock equipment like lead ropes, blankets, bedding, wheelbarrows, rakes, pitchforks, buckets, hoses, fly spray, chlorine, disinfectant and lime in a central location in the event a quick escape is needed.
- Take supplies of needed livestock medications and medical records.
- Disconnect power to farm and ranch structures.

Planning pays off

- Plan multiple routes to shelters and areas where livestock can be housed and resources are kept.
- Make sure trailers and vehicles are in good working order and ready to go.
- Plan for access to farm and ranch property with law enforcement agencies in the event reentry is required during an evacuation.
- Know the emergency planning and services resources in your local area and county.

Have a plan

- If you do not have a horse trailer, check with others in your area who do. Make plans for mutual assistance in a disaster.
- Discuss emergency evacuation plans with your cattle hauler. In a wildfire or flood, other livestock owners in your area will be calling on their services at the same time.
- Maintain first aid supplies for the family and the livestock.
- Move livestock early. Waiting until the last minute to evacuate can mean leaving some animals behind as conditions deteriorate or emergency vehicles and personnel prevent access.

Defensible space

- State law requires 100 feet of cleared "defensible space" around homes and structures, including barns, shops and storage facilities. Defensible space provides better protection for ranch owners, firefighters and livestock.
- Cut tree limbs that overhang farm and ranch structures.
- Take care when selecting a place to store firewood and on-farm building materials.
- In highly fire-prone areas, keep disking equipment hitched to expand fire breaks if necessary.
- Maintain a brush-control program year-round and stick to it.

Online resources

A number of experts have developed guidelines for creating animal rescue and evacuation plans. Here's a sampling:

- www.cdfr.ca.gov/ahfss/ah/disaster_preparedness.htm
- www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vetext/AN-Progs.html
- www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=13061
- www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_11_,00.html