

# Hurricane preparedness for horse owners



**Should you go or should you stay?** Whenever circular cloud patterns start generating hurricane force winds along the Gulf and Eastern shores of the United States, horse and livestock owners are faced with deciding whether to ride out the storm in place or load their animals, gear, and assorted supplies and travel inland, away from the dangers of the storm.

The best period to prepare for this is well ahead of the time when you need to move out of the path of an approaching hurricane. You should put a disaster plan in place for you (and any boarders you may have) and discuss it regularly to assure everyone is aware of the plan in the event of an emergency. With proper planning and preparation, you can help save your horses lives.

## Some things to consider:

- 1. Making a decision.** Before the hurricane season even begins, you will need to decide how severe the storm will have to get before you evacuate your horses. For example, will you stay for a category 2, and evacuate for a category 3? Consider networking within the horse community and determine two possible evacuation facilities in opposite directions. In this way, depending on the storm's direction or changes in path, you will already have chosen a safe place. Make sure you know ahead of time what the shelter facility owners require and come prepared.
- 2. Documents and important information.** Keep good records handy. In an emergency situation, you may not be able to cross borders without appropriate documentation. You will need copies of the horse's papers, proof of ownership and clean Coggins along with vaccination and health records that are up to date. You should also have a copy of each horse's medical history, your veterinarian's contact information, and a signed permission statement for emergency treatment accompanying each horse.

Keep all of your emergency numbers, employee contact numbers, and all other horse owner contact numbers together in one location.

- 3. Identification.** Each horse should be identified by means of a tattoo, brand/ID bands or a micro-chip. Micro-chips are considered the best way to identify a horse. Keep the ID number in a safe place and easily accessible location. After a natural disaster, it will take some time to determine and contact the owners of each horse, so it's a good idea to use some additional means to easily identify your horse. Tags with emergency information - including insurance information incorporated into the horses halter - is a good way to provide this. Markel provides laminated tags with emergency 800 numbers that can be attached to your horse's halter. Remember, the use of a halter should only be in the event you will transport your horse. If your horse will be staying on your property during the storm, you do NOT want to leave halters on due to tangle/entrapment risks that can result in injury or death.

Other ways to ID your horse include using latex spray paint or clippers to paint or clip your phone number on the horse's back. Or you can use an indelible ink (permanent) marker to write, on a wide ribbon, a light weight luggage tag, or laminated business card. The written information should include your horse's description, your name and contact information laminate and can be braided into each horse's mane and tail. If your horse isn't tattooed or branded, prepare both paper and electronic copies of pictures of your horse for reclaiming purposes. Ideally, this would include a picture of the owner and the horse together to ensure ownership.

- 4. Medications.** If your horse must be sedated for hauling or requires special medication, have these supplies ready and send them with your horse along with needed instructions.

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5. **First aid kit.** Prepare an emergency first aid kit (and have it in your trailer at all times). Make sure it is stocked with basic wound care and medications. The Connecticut Horse Council provides guidance on what to include in an equine first aid kit at: <http://cthorsecouncil.org/resources/EquineHealthEMRFiles/CHCEmergencySuppliesList.pdf>
  6. **Tack.** All horses being evacuated should be shipped with their own lead ropes and halter. (Halters can carry disease so make certain that you use a clean halter that was not used on a sick animal.) Put the horse's name on the halter and include your contact information. Do not saddle horses prior to shipping. Do not halter horses that are left out in the field (the halter can get tangled and caught in debris and cause serious injury or death).
  7. **Trailer.** Before the hurricane season begins, as well as regularly during the season, inspect your trailer to make sure it is road worthy and safe to transport horses. Check the floor, tires, brakes and lights to make certain they are in working order. You should plan to evacuate your horses while the storm is at least 4 days away.
  8. **Truck.** Inspect your truck to be certain it is ready to pull the trailer. Inspect the hitch to make sure it is secure and in proper working order. Make sure that you have a full tank of gas. DO NOT carry full gas cans in your horse trailer.
  9. **Emergency tool kit.** Prepare an emergency tool kit to include a flash light, battery powered radio, bottled water, hammer, screwdriver and basic farrier tools. A larger emergency barn kit is recommended in the barn in the event you have horses stay on site during a storm (see #3 in the next section).
  10. **Supplies for your horses.** According to the Colorado State University Extension ([www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/livestk/01817.html](http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/livestk/01817.html)), your horse emergency evacuation checklist should include:
    - a. At least a week's supply of hay, grain, and water for each horse
    - b. paperwork (health certificates, vaccination records, brand paperwork)
    - c. first aid kit
    - d. horse medication(s), if applicable
    - e. ropes
    - f. leather halter(s)
    - g. water bucket
    - h. identity halter/tag
    - i. boarding arrangement destination
    - j. contact destination
    - k. priority destination
  11. **Location.** Ideally you should send your horse as far from the shore line and major wind impact as possible. This will vary state to state and city to city. Check with the proper authorities in your area to make sure. Decide on two possible evacuation shelters in different directions. Once you make your choices, make sure you know what the shelters require.
  12. **Feed.** Carry enough feed or hay for each horse to last at least a week. Be certain to have enough water as well.
  13. **Prioritize.** If your trailer does not have the capacity to transport all of your horses, decide NOW which horses you are going to evacuate first. Plan ahead so that you have plenty of time to make necessary round trips long before mandatory evacuations are ordered.
  14. **Emergency fencing.** If your horses are used to being fenced, purchase several rolls of orange plastic wind/construction fencing and have them available in a safe place. This can be used in a bind to close up any gaps in damaged fencing and put in place with a staple gun.
  15. **Preparation of barn/stable.** Clean up the barn aisles and around the barn. Make sure all loose items such as hoses, rakes, wheel barrows, and the like are properly stored inside the barn or storage area so that these items do not become dangerous projectiles in high winds. If you do not have a covered or enclosed storage option for your equipment, secure everything to your property firmly.
- During a storm (if you have horses that will stay).** If you cannot move your horses and are in a flood-prone area or expecting high winds, past hurricane experiences have demonstrated that horses left outside where they have the room and ability to move to higher ground are most likely to survive with minimal injury. Those left locked inside a barn or other structure are more likely to sustain seriously injuries or die. If you leave your horses in a covered area do not close the doors or gates – you want them to be able to escape to higher ground if water begins to rise. Be certain also that they have access to plenty of safe water and food as it may take a while for you to get back to them. Do NOT leave your horse outside with a halter on. The halter can get tangled and caught in debris and cause serious injury or death.

Prior to storm activity, you should consider the following:

1. **Signs.** Make two signs each with a full 4'X 8' sheet of wood or a large flat sheet – using large letters and dark paint spray paint. On one side, paint: "HAVE ANIMALS, NEED HELP;" on the other side paint, "HAVE ANIMALS -- OK FOR NOW." Store the signs in a safe place for use after the storm has passed.

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2. **Emergency supplies.** You should have a supply of emergency first aid supplies on hand as well as feed, hay, and water in the event the storm wipes out your normal supply. Wrap or store each in water proof containers to prevent contamination.
3. **Emergency barn kit.** Put together some supplies you may need after a storm such as a chain saw and fuel, hammers, hand saw, nails, screws, fencing materials and fire ant killer (see #7, next section). Place this kit in a secure area before the storm hits.
4. **Fire prevention.** Turn off circuit breakers to the barn before leaving. A power surge could cause sparks and fire.
5. **Protect yourself.** If your area issues mandatory evacuation orders and you cannot evacuate your horse to safer ground do NOT stay behind with your horses. Do the best you can for the animals and get out safely. Repeat: Do NOT stay in the barn with your horses.
7. **Fire ants and snakes.** Ants and snakes will look for the driest place to nest and will move from wet to high ground when their nests flood. Check your barn/stall walls and feed/hay areas. Ants will also seek refuge from wet ground on fence rails and tree branches, so take care when clearing debris after a storm. Do not put your hands or feet in recesses you cannot see.
8. **Fencing.** Walk your property and check your entire fence line for damage and either repair it or put up emergency orange plastic construction fencing to keep your horses from getting onto roads or other potentially dangerous situations.
9. **Feed.** Don't use feed or hay that is wet or has been in flood waters.
10. **Found horses.** If you find a horse in your pasture or yard that does not belong to you, carefully approach the animal. First, check for injuries at a safe distance. Then, if the horse will allow you to approach, do so with caution to check more closely for injuries, identification, and contact information. As you will have no way of knowing if the strange horse has any diseases or behavior traits that can be a threat to your horses, it is important to keep him away from your horses. Place the horse in a separate pasture, using emergency plastic fencing if necessary to keep the horse a safe distance from yours. Contact the owner as soon as possible. If there is no identification on the horse, contact your veterinarian to see if he can determine and read the micro-chip. Make sure the horse has plenty of clean water and clean hay until the owner can be found and the horse taken home or other arrangements can be made.

## After the storm.

1. **Follow-up.** If your horse was evacuated to an emergency boarding facility, call and verify that your horse was received and make sure you have all of their contact information.
2. **If your horse stayed.** As soon as possible, check on all the animals for injuries, illnesses and dehydration. Make sure all animals have adequate water.
3. **Going outside.** Be very careful as live electric wires could be all around you. Locate your animals and tend to any minor wounds. Check fencing and put up emergency fencing where needed. Carefully try to clean debris from the barn, and clear the driveway out to the road.
4. **Check stalls.** Make sure that they are clear of debris, water, and snakes before putting your horses back in them. Do NOT put your hands into places that you cannot see – snakes can be hiding in them!
5. **Signs.** Place one of the signs at the edge of your driveway, at the roadside, with the appropriate writing facing the road. Place the other sign in a clear area that is visible from the air so that aircraft flying overhead will be able to see it to determine if you need help. If you do not have a severely injured animal, put the "OK" sign up. If you need help, put your "NEED HELP" sign up and help will get to you as soon as possible.
6. **Flooding.** Keep horses out of flooded pastures and other areas as the water could be unsafe for drinking.

For additional information on Hurricane Preparedness, go to Markel's Guide at: <http://www.markelinsurance.com/~media/specialty/risk-management/safety%20guides/hurricane%20preparedness.pdf?la=en>

## Resources:

College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University  
<http://vetmed.tamu.edu/>

American Association of Equine Practitioners - Emergency & Disaster Preparedness Committee  
<http://awic.nal.usda.gov/companion-animals/emergencies-and-disaster-planning>

Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Brand Commission <http://www.ldaf.state.la.us/>

US Department of Agriculture  
<http://awic.nal.usda.gov/companion-animals/emergencies-and-disaster-planning>

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