



In the real world potential disaster conditions exist, and we deal with them on lesser levels everyday. Horses are trapped every time we put them in a stall, a barn, a paddock, or a field. We limit their options and select their environments. We put them in areas where there are metal, all types of debris, and limited food and water that depend on human management. We have intermittent problems with road construction that make us re-route, truck or trailer failures that keep us at home, short-term inability to reach our veterinarian or farrier when needed, cars going through our fences, and dogs running through our fields.

One of the definitions of a disaster is something which overwhelms our ability as individuals or a community to deal with a problem financially, physically, or through resources (human or material). If it doesn't overwhelm, it isn't a disaster.

Remember the day when city water was shut off and you had to pack water from the neighbor's farm. While it wasn't really a disaster, you thought about what would happen if the water were off for more than a day or two. Or the ice storm when neither you nor your horses could walk safely for two days. Then there was the hail storm that dented your new trailer and put bruises on you and the horses when you tried to bring them into the barn. Remember the news reports of the tornado that touched down only a county or so away, and all the destruction it brought in just a few seconds?

These all are disasters you have faced or to which you have been exposed. But what would you do if any of these things happened on our farm, occurred over an extended period of time, or struck a large area of your community? Sebastian Heath "wrote the book" on Animal Management in Disasters, and one of the principle rules he learned from his hands-on work is that a disaster's affects on animals were not due as much to the impact of the storm as to the consequences of the chaos that followed.



Disaster Planning

The principal goal of the animal professions in the management of animals in disasters is to reduce the occurrence and impact of common, local, and personal disasters. The underlying principle is that preparedness for disasters that occur every day is the best preparation for extraordinary disasters. In this context, it is important to realize that individual animal owners have the greatest potential to protect their animals from disasters. People who are unprepared and unable to take care of their own needs when disaster strikes will not be able to help others.

- When disaster first threatens, horses should be rounded up immediately. This will make it easier to catch and rescue them if necessary. Human safety should not be placed at risk to save horses. Other actions that should be taken when the threat of a disaster arises are the following:
 1. All electrical appliances should be unplugged. If a light must be left on, it should be a ceiling fixture.
 2. If water is not available from reliable troughs, it should be provided in large, heavy bowls/buckets that cannot be tipped.
 3. All flammable and poisonous chemicals should be secured.
 4. If there is a danger of flooding, horses should be led to higher ground early. Often, higher ground can be reached only by first traversing low ground. Food and water should be available at the higher location.
- Horses cannot be transported across state lines or boarded in many places without a current negative Coggins test. Owners should keep copies of this test and other documents, such as registration, ownership, and vaccination and medical records, in a safe place (such as a deposit box, household safe, or in a sealable plastic bag in a freezer). If horses must be left behind, owners should have with them when they evacuate a sealable plastic bag with a photograph of the horses, copies of pertinent ownership and medical papers, and information about electronic or other animal identification. Horse thievery is a problem that horse owners faces on a daily basis across the country, but it is a problem that is exacerbated by disaster and confusion. Taking time to identify animals before an emergency strikes possibly could save the horse's life during a disaster.
- An owner also should make sure that whoever is caring for the horse knows where the owner can be contacted, where the horse will be kept in case of evacuation, and what each horse's needs are likely to be (special medication etc.).
- Set up a "buddy system" of responsibility. If everyone on your farm were injured or kept away, would a neighbor know how many horses you had on your property, how much to feed them, or how they were stabled? Would someone besides yourself or your immediate family members be able to identify a horse as yours or know if a horse were stolen or lost from your property?
- Horses should have leather halters and rope lead shanks, especially in transportation situations. Leather is more likely to break under stress than nylon, and leather won't melt into a horse's skin in case of a fire.
- When horses are stressed, moved or mixed into new herds - such as might happen after an evacuation or when free-roaming horses are caught after a natural disaster - common sense and horsemanship should prevail. Horses should be kept in safe enclosures free of obvious dangers (nails, debris, wire, electrical hazards, etc.) Smaller groups of horses will be less likely to fight than horses in densely stocked pens or paddocks.
- A first aid kit should be equipped and ready for immediate use. Your veterinarian can suggest the items for your kit to personalize it to your horse's individual needs.
- Check your local power supply company to see what your farm's status is in the event of emergency power outage. Some rural locations are low priorities for power restoration. You might want to consider the purchase of a generator to supply some of your needs.
- Needless to say, fire extinguishers are a must in barns, homes, and other buildings on your farm.

Preparing for the small-scale and everyday problems you might experience on the farm or away from the home is the best means to be ready for large-scale disasters and avoid getting into a situation where your needs outstrip your resources. Establishing your own disaster plan, getting neighbors together to discuss a community plan, and working with local and state officials will ensure that not only are you and your family members safe, but your horses are cared for as well.

Disaster planning starts now. And while it is hoped you will never need to use any of your plans, averting even one small personal disaster will make all the investment of thought, time, and money worthwhile.

This information only touches a few of the steps you should take. There are many resources to obtain further information that would be beneficial. There is a federal program called National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD) that reviews methods by which volunteer organizations gather resources and make them available to disaster victims.