

Hurricane Season: Are You Prepared?

Tips for safely getting through the hurricane season with your horse.

By Georgia Brown

There are many choices to make when a storm is approaching, but to keep your horses out of danger, plan ahead and get moving early. Emergency planners in Florida and North Carolina based the following tips on the experiences of storm survivors.

Update Vaccinations

Check with your vet to be sure your horses have a tetanus booster and encephalitis shots to get them through the rainy season. Encephalitis, a disease that is carried by mosquitoes, can kill humans and horses. Most vets recommend vaccinating every 4 to 6 months.

Identification Options

Purchase a leather neckband or fetlock ID bands for the front legs and have them ready before the hurricane nears.

Put a leather halter on each horse and attach a luggage tag with your contact information and any special veterinarian care. Waterproof it with a small zip-lock bag and tape that to the halter. You can also braid a second luggage tag into the long hairs of the tail.

Take a photograph of your horse and one with you and your horse together so that you can easily prove ownership.

Not everyone is honest in an emergency. A microchip, tattoo, branding or freeze marking is permanent. Very few freeze marked horses are stolen.

See www.horseweb.com/kka for more information on freeze branding.

If there isn't time for the above, use a small animal clipper to etch your phone number on your horse's neck.

Preparing your Property

The choice of whether you should keep your horse in the barn or an open field is an individual one. Use common sense when considering the barn structure, trees or power lines that may increase risk.

Clear away any items that might be tossed around by hurricane winds. Bundle jump poles together and check the interior walls of your barn and shelves for loose objects.

Bed all stalls; fill water buckets, all water tubs, and any large containers that can be lined with plastic garbage bags. Allow 20 gallons of water/horse/day. Store a two-week supply of feed in containers and cover hay

with plastic or waterproof tarps.

Put the number of your county agricultural extension agency or large animal control office in a prominent place. Call when you have questions.

Review your insurance policies.

Talk to your neighbors. Will they evacuate or weather the storm at home?

Tools

Prepare a first-aid kit and keep it in a safe place for emergencies. Store tools you'll need for repairing the damage, including fencing materials, nails and hammers, duck tape, chain saw and fuel. Have plenty of batteries on hand for flashlights of different sizes.

Secure a (four horsepower or greater) generator to provide power for refrigeration and water pump needs. One that runs off a diesel tractor will be most economical if you are without power for more than a few days.

Emergency Stabling

Check with your county Emergency Management office for stables that will take evacuees. You will be expected to show a Coggins certificate and bring your own feed, hay, bedding and buckets. In Florida, the Sunshine State Horse Council (www.sshc.org) has a directory of stables, or you can register your stable if you can take horses in an emergency.

Evacuating

If you decide to leave with your horses, have your destination planned in advance and leave early. Being stuck in traffic pulling a trailer full of horses is another type of emergency. Carry extra fuel cans in the truck bed, not the trailer, and remember in high winds tractor trailers are blown around like toys.

Hunkering Down

Do not stay in the barn with your horse during the storm. Attach ID and check the supply of water and hay in each stall. Doubling up so that buddies stay together may be an option. Turn off circuit breakers to the barn in the event of power surges that could cause sparks. Place fly masks on pastured horses to reduce the incidence of eye injuries.

After the Storm

If you need assistance, make a sign on a 4 x 8 sheet of wood or write on a king size flat sheet. In large letters spray paint: "HAVE INJURED

ANIMALS, NEED HELP." If you have property damage, document it with a camera that stamps date and time.

Take heart. Past hurricanes have proven horses show remarkable survival abilities in the face of natural disaster-often surpassing those of humans.