



FIRE PREPARATION FOR YOUR HORSES

Preparation is the key for reducing anxiety and reducing risks associated with natural disasters.

Emergency plans need to be made well in advance and be familiar to your entire family. Ideally plans should be practiced in advance of any forecast event. Flexibility in your emergency plan is important; bushfires will progress and change rapidly so contingency plans are critical. Part of your emergency plan should include where you may decide to evacuate to, and what triggers will make you decide it is time to go. Make sure your transport options have been organised well in advance and your float or truck is road worthy, has had regular safety checks and is fueled up. Your horses should be taught well in advance to load. If they are not transported regularly, repeating the loading exercise every few months is important.

Identification of your property is also important. The property should be well marked from the road. A sign that indicates if you are staying to defend or have evacuated is very helpful to emergency services. Other things you may consider is a Sitemap listing any assets (such as water sources, fire pumps etc) as well as hazards (gas mains, chemical storage). A map listing any animals which are remaining on the property should also be included. Keeping your neighbours apprised of your plans is important, and working together to stay safe is the key to maximising safety.

Identification of your animals is very helpful during natural disasters. Microchipping is ideal, however temporary name tags (such as ManeStay™) or stock markers can be used. The identification should include your name and mobile phone. Emergency contact lists can be made in advance and forwarded to friends, family and your veterinarian.

You need to be familiar with all of your access and escape routes both on and near your property. Internal gates may be opened to allow your horses to move away from the fire path. If rugs and blankets are to be left on horses they should be natural fibres (such as wool) . Halters left on may help your horse be caught if needed, but could pose a risk if the halter catches on a damaged fence. External gates should never be left open. Horses that get access to roads pose a substantial danger to the emergency services and risk being struck by vehicles. Remember visibility can be reduced to almost nothing as a fire moves through. Make sure any animals you leave behind have access to plenty of water.

Having a first aid kit ready to go is also encouraged. Ideas for inclusions in a first aid kit include:

- Waterproof container
- Emergency numbers
- Gauze bandages
- Cotton bandages, vetrap and elastoplast and non-adherent dressings
- Saline
- Antibiotic ointment
- Betadine solution
- Gloves, towels
- Thermometer
- Stethoscope
- Scissors
- Current medications



Fire specific injuries usually include burns to the skin, eyes and hooves. This will result in fluid and electrolyte loss and predispose to infection. Burnt feet can lead to laminitis as well. The respiratory tract can be directly injured from heat, however carbon monoxide and other chemicals inhaled are also harmful. Oedema and swelling of the airways can occur, and respiratory infections can result.

Simple things to remember when treating burn injuries in horses include the following:

- Do not apply any lotions or ointments to burns
- Do not touch the injured areas or burst any blisters
- Do not remove anything sticking to the burn.
- Put cold running water onto the burned area for 20min
- Cover the burn with a non-adherent dressing, or aluminium foil, plastic wrap or a wet clean dressing
- Treatment – pain medications (such as phenylbutazone), antibiotics, diligent cleaning and wound care
- Immediately after the burn cool with ice or cold water bath and lavage then with a weak sterile saline If available.
- Only use water based antibiotic ointments
- Monitor breathing closely due to possible smoke inhalation. If any inflammation or swelling occurs in the airway it is vital that veterinary attention is sought immediately as anti-inflammatories and antibiotics may be required.
- Corneal ulceration can be a concern as well – so careful evaluation of the eyes is important. Cleaning the eyes with saline initially is acceptable.

If your property and horses have been impacted by fire, when it is safe to return to your property you should check for safety hazards such as fallen power lines and trees before entering the paddock. Be aware there can be some very hot areas in paddocks after a fire has moved through, especially around tree roots. If possible, move your horses to an area that has not been impacted by fire and the ground is cooler. Check all fence lines for damage. Be aware in many instances both your horse's water and feed may have been contaminated with ash and chemicals and need to be changed. If your horse has been in the path of a fire, assessment by a veterinarian when it is safe is encouraged.