

# Trail Talk

Expert advice, straight from the...  
*[horse veterinarian's]*  
...mouth!



**Welcome to Trail Talk with the VHC Equine Service!**

## **2018 KHC Horse Care 101 Seminar**

*Disaster and Emergency Response*

Saturday, October 6, 2018 • 8:00 a.m.

Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Mosier Hall

**Register Today!**

## **Protecting Horses Against Fires**

Do you have a fire plan for your family? Do you have a fire plan for your horses? With the most recent wildfire disasters in the western U.S. and in the not-so-distant past here in Kansas, it is important to have an equine fire plan. In addition, it is important to understand what fires could do to exposed horses.



### **Steps to creating a fire plan for you and your horses:**

#### **1. Prevention**

Whether you are a horse owner with a barn or boarding a horse at a facility, it is important to review the structure and items used in or around the facility/farm with fire safety in mind. You can begin assessing your barn today by double-checking electrical outlets for exposed wires and proper covering. Use GFCI outlets - near water sources. Prevent flammable material from collecting around outlets (like hay and stall bedding). Barns and farms use a

lot of electricity and outlets for multiple purposes depending on the time of the year; therefore it is imperative not to over-use circuits (especially too many plug-ins on one outlet). Consult with your local fire department and an electrician to provide additional insight.

Along with reviewing electrical hazards, materials that are highly flammable should be stored in safe locations. This would include hay stacked outside or next to the barn/pens, other flammable materials (cleaning agents, gasoline and isopropyl alcohol-aka rubbing alcohol), and dead organic debris stacked outside or next to the barn/pens (twigs, fire wood, dead trees, and bushes). Also, don't forget about the barn gutters, as embers can blow up into these areas. You should remove/clean debris from the gutters to prevent a source of fuel for a potential fire.

## **2. How to evacuate horses**

It is recommended to prepare and go through fire drills that include your barn/farm area. Working with your local fire department and local equine organization (e.g. KS Dept. of Agriculture, KSART) to develop a proper evacuation plan may be the difference in saving human and animal lives. Once a fire escape route is made for the barn/farm, distribute this to all personnel, including owners of all horses boarded on the property. In addition, it is beneficial to have equipment placed in different areas around the barn/farm to fight fires (including fire extinguishers and water hoses), and train people in using this equipment.

Each horse should have a halter and lead rope readily available. Contact lists of emergency personnel, such as fire station and veterinarian, along with contacts for individual horse owners should be easily accessible. Stall cards can be prepared to include this information, which will provide an effective way for emergency personnel to get in touch with owners if they must evacuate horse(s). An additional option is to have information tags clipped onto halters with the owner's phone number or general information included.

## **3. How to protect horses during wildfires**

In some cases it is hard to move livestock/horses when a wildfire is moving across the area. Have a defensible space for your horses to take cover in if wildfire is coming fast. A 100 feet perimeter surrounding a barn, paddocks, or other structures is recommended. The space should be devoid of overgrown brush, flammable chemicals or trees that could fuel a fire when wildfire is eminent. Barns may not be the safest area (even if structures are equipped with sprinkler systems). Barns may have fuel sources for fire and areas where horses could become trapped. Paddocks and metal-constructed areas are a safer shelter for horses in these defensible spaces. In addition, it is important to lock/close up the evacuated barn to prevent scared horses from running back into them during a fire and becoming trapped.

Plan to have a water source that could water your horses for 3-7 days if you are evacuated and not able to return. A metal stock tank is generally sufficient for this purpose. Water hydrants with exclusively metal parts are superior and will be functional even after fire goes through and destroys plastics.

Hay might not be the best source for animal feed depending on the situation, as it can be a fuel during a fire. You should consult your fire station and veterinarian to discuss this. If it is used in one of the barn areas, it should be contained in one spot of the pen. This way if the hay was to catch on fire it is not surrounding horses during the burning. Another possibility

would be to utilize wetted down alfalfa cubes, alfalfa pellets or dehydrated hay flakes that have been soaked. This will provide forage until occupancy is restored.

Mark all animals/horses with identification. Microchips for horses could be one easy way to identify your horse with your contact information (don't forget to register your microchips). You could also put cattle ear tags with the necessary information braided in the mane or tail of the horse. Another option would be to use an indelible markers to write contact information on the horse's hoof.

Mark your property with fire resistant placards of horses/animals that are present on your property with your contact information. This will allow firefighters know what animals are being sheltered at your place during a wildfire.

#### 4. Who to contact

It is beneficial to have contact information of all emergency personnel and professionals who may help prevent and respond to fires. This includes, your local fire department and other equine disaster/emergency groups that could respond. In addition, it is beneficial to work with your local fire department for equine training so they are comfortable putting on halters and lead ropes and leading horses. Having your local veterinarian's phone number handy to help treat animals during and after fires is also important.

- Did you know that smoke inhalation could last up to 30 days after a fire and can have long-term consequences if not treated?
- Fire burns need to be examined and treated by a veterinarian as an emergency, based on what burns can do for pain, infection, dehydration and possibly shock.

You can always call the Veterinary Health Center at Kansas State University if you have additional questions about animal related fires: 785-532-5700 (large animal) and 785-532-5690 (small animal).

*Sincerely,*

**VHC Equine Services**  
Veterinary Health Center at  
Kansas State University  
785-532-5700



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STAY CONNECTED



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