



“Devils on Horseback”

In times of crisis, people worry not only about their family and property but also about their livestock and pets. There are steps that horse owners can take to prepare themselves in case their property comes under threat of bushfire.

The key to survival is forward planning and self-reliance.

Leave or Stay? ... It's Your Decision!

Fire Authorities emphasise that bush fire protection strategies include forward planning. Everyone's situation differs according to the size and nature of their horse enterprise. That's why each and every horse owner needs to develop an individual survival plan, coolly and calmly, before the fire season arrives.

You are responsible for developing an Individual Fire Plan (IFP) for your property. This includes your horses. Whether you leave or stay is your decision.

Once you have decided a plan for your house and family, consider your horses:

- *Assess your risk from a fire (or ask your local Fire Brigade to assist you undertake the risk assessment);*
- *What can you do to reduce the risk? Examples include controlled hazard reduction, removal of vegetation and preparing a horse safe area;*
- *What is the likely direction of any fire?*
- *When do I need to move horses/leave the property?*

Planning – The key to survival for you and your horses

- *Where is my water supply, how much do I have and how do I access it?*
- *Which route do I take?*
- *Where can I go and what alternatives exist?*
- *What resources do I have access to?*
- *What are the limitations?*
- *Is my plan to evacuate? When, where and how?*
- *What is your trigger to activate your IFP?*

The risk of losing life and property during a bushfire is influenced by these factors and others.

You must incorporate your horses in your IFP.

Reduce fire hazards before the fire season starts:

- Remove all fire fuel such as excess grass, sticks, leaf litter etc for 20 to 30 metres around buildings;
- Store hay, straw, shavings, scrap wood, fuel supplies and chemicals safely away from important buildings;
- Clean roof surfaces and gutters regularly;
- Create firebreaks in strategic locations develop a grazing plan to reduce fire risk;
- A well maintained garden and well watered lawn will help protect the house;
- Post “no smoking” signs in and around the stable and in vegetated areas as appropriate;
- Use fire-resistant plants on your property.

Horse safe areas

Identify a “safe” area on the property where horses can be placed if evacuation is not possible or practical. This area should be:

- ✓ as large as possible (10 acres is ideal but often impractical in urban areas)
- ✓ closely grazed paddock or be created from several paddocks by opening gates
- ✓ a lush green paddock area
- ✓ Ideally it should have a dam with clear access.
- ✓ An alternative “safe” area might be a large well fenced sand arena provided there are no trees or building nearby that will burn readily.
- ✓ Indoor arenas are excellent but beware of radiant heat exhaustion to horses if contained for a long period.
- ✓ If you live in a high risk area, invest in a rainwater storage tank, a sprinkler system and a fire-fighting pump
- ✓ Consider erecting fireproof fencing, i.e. steel or concrete posts, particularly if you own a stallion
- ✓ If your fences are electrified, make sure the remainder of fences are “horse proof” as often power is out during a bushfire.

UNSAFE HORSE AREAS INCLUDE STABLES, DAY YARDS, BARNs AND HEAVILY WOODED PADDOCKS.

Triggers- what are they?

Many people have a great Fire Plan but don't consider what activates it. We call this a trigger. Your trigger will depend on a number of factors and is specific to your circumstances. Examples of triggers can include a predetermined threat level or Fire Danger Rating. Discuss possible triggers, decide which one is appropriate for you, incorporate that trigger into your IFP and communicate it with your family and friends.

Do not hesitate to act immediately if your trigger occurs.

Evacuation

If you decide to evacuate with or without your horse/s, this decision must be made very early. Late evacuation is a deadly option. Once the fire is close, visibility will be very poor and travel will be hazardous. Fallen trees, power-lines, abandoned cars and even fire-fighting vehicles can easily block roads.

Even quiet horses may panic in a float filled with smoke or when exposed to the noise of sirens.

Resources

Make sure you have an adequate tow vehicle available on high risk days.

Ensure that you and your fire buddy know exactly which areas your horses are going to in the event of an evacuation and how long they may be there.

Have a pre-arranged agistment agreement in case your horses have to stay a lot longer than expected.

Reciprocate! Offer to be a fire buddy to a friend or, if that is not possible, offer to help feed out or coordinate at your local horse riding club in the event of an emergency situation.

Identify Your Horses

Microchipped horses will be more speedily reunited with their owners if separation occurs during a disaster. In an emergency at the very least be prepared to “paint” your name and phone number on the horse itself using livestock grease crayons like the ones used to number horses in endurance rides, or clip similar details on its hair coat or paint its hooves. Neckbands, hip stickers and identification tags on leather head collars can also be useful.

Prepare an Evacuation Cache

Equip a 240L plastic wheelie bin (with lid) to become an easily transportable Emergency Cache. Wheelie bins can be moved by most adults, are easy to load into your float (via ramp) and can be clearly marked with your property/stud or personal name for ease of identity. With some care, your cache should see you self-sufficient for fodder and first aid for 96hrs. Refer to *Fact Sheet 3, Checklists for more information on what goes in an Emergency Cache.*

Just do it!

Take a few moments to think about **‘What will I ‘do’ with this information?** Some examples include;

<i>Individual Fire Plans</i>	<i>Develop a Telephone Tree</i>
<i>Fire Buddy System</i>	<i>Ask a local vet to conduct mass microchipping</i>
<i>Emergency Cache</i>	<i>Have emergency information training sessions with your club</i>
<i>Host pre-fire season meetings meeting with neighbours, friends or other mutual interest groups</i>	<i>Set up a bushfire emergency plan with the landholder if your horses are agisted.</i>