

Preparing for Fire on Horse Properties

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We all have seen the advertisements in the media to prepare for the fire season, yet many of us do not give it a second thought. Prevention and planning may prevent or reduce the impact of fire on your horse property. I would like to discuss a few important factors that could eliminate or reduce the impact of fires.

Planning

Unlike a nonhorse person, we need to consider many factors about planning for fires rather than just grabbing prized possessions and leaving. You should plan for the worst-case scenario of the evacuation of your farm.

Know where you are going to go. Have a few safe sites where you know you can go, as fires may block evacuation routes.

If you have more horses than spots in your float or truck, know where you can obtain transport, move them prior if enough warning or try and place them in an area of your farm that will minimise the risk of injury. DO NOT let your horses out on the road. This will increase the risk of injury to your horses, but will also increase the chance of injuring other people evacuating and emergency services.

Take adequate feed, buckets for water, rugs, etc for extended periods off your farm.

Inform neighbours and family of your intentions if you are going to evacuate and where you are going to. Many communities with high horse populations now have evacuation points for horses. Contact your local council for details.

If you are going to stay, you should make sure that the risk to horses and yourself is minimised. If you have a grassy open property, arrange an area that is free of grass such as a ménage or round pen. If possible have a water sprinkler system set up that will spray over your horses. Ensure that horse's rugs and fly masks are removed. The constant spray will reduce embers that may fall on them.

Preparation for minimising the damage

Obviously, there is no way of preventing fires. However if we are proactive, we can minimise the damage fire can do to our properties. If we practice fodder conservation "cutting hay" we should not have long dry grass around the property. Slashing paddocks and spraying with herbicide fence lines will slow the fire down if it ventures onto your property. If you have your fence lines bared out, it will increase their chances of survival and will allow you to settle back to your property earlier if

fire does burn on your property. If your property is large enough, plough fire breaks around the perimeter of your property and even within, especially around your “rally point” if you are staying. If you are lucky enough to have access to irrigation water, it would be wise to have areas of green grass especially around your “refuge point”. Whilst if severe enough green pasture will burn it will slow the fire significantly. Hopefully enough for the fire crews to arrive.

Liaise with neighbours to have a community approach to fire preparation. Ensure fence lines are cleared; fire breaks done, cleanup fallen trees and limbs. If you can help neighbours out it may help save your property.

For more information, most state Department of Primary Industries has technical notes for horse owners on how to prepare and deal with the threat of fires.

Good Luck and Stay Safe.

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