



HORSES AND BUSHFIRES

A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR HORSE OWNERS

All people who live near bush, grassland or coastal areas need to develop a Bushfire Survival Plan. Although you may not live in a high risk bushfire area you may agist your horses in an area of risk. Whether your horses are located at home or on an agistment property you must plan and prepare for their safety.

There are steps that you can take to reduce the impact of bushfire on your horses.

Prepare a safe place for your horse

Horses are quite good at avoiding bushfire if two conditions are met:

- They are given enough room to move freely in a large open space
- There is minimal vegetation in the large open space

A large well-grazed paddock or a series of smaller paddocks with the internal gates left open would be suitable. Ideally the paddock they are in should have a dam in it where the horse can seek relief from the heat.

A large sand ménage can also be suitable if there are no buildings or vegetation close-by that could catch fire.

On Severe, Extreme or Code Red fire danger days, move your horses to your designated safer paddock or area.

Do not lock your horses in a stable, holding yard or similar environment as your horse may panic and hurt themselves if confined.

Do not let your horses out on the roads as they will be in more danger from traffic and fire.

A horse's natural instinct is to run from danger including bushfire and they will quickly move to burnt ground to survive.

What to do if you or your horse won't be safe on your property

There are a number of options you may wish to consider:

- Agisting your horses out of the area during summer (Fire Danger Period)
- Making arrangements to temporarily move your horses on Severe, Extreme or Code Red days.
In this situation you may be able to move your horses to:
 - a. A neighbour or friend's property
 - b. Local showgrounds
 - c. Saleyards
 - d. Racetracks
 - e. Pony club grounds

Get together with friends or other agistees or club members to arrange a group strategy. If you agist your horses it is important to find out what the bushfire plan is for the property.

If you plan to move your horses to another location remember that you will need to move them well in advance of fire threatening your property. It is unlikely you will be able to safely move your horses once a fire has started.

Once a fire starts it can travel quickly making it dangerous for you and your horses to be on the road. Visibility will be poor due to smoke and roads will be dangerous due to spot fires, falling trees, and emergency vehicles on the roads. Roads may be closed making it impossible to reach your horses or to remove the horses from the property.

Other considerations

On Severe, Extreme or Code Red fire danger days it is recommended that you remove all gear from your horses as it could melt or become very hot and cause serious burns or get caught on fences. It is not necessary to leave any rugs on your horses.

Permanently identify your horses. Identification could include microchipping or branding. If your horse is difficult to catch you may consider leaving a leather halter on with identification tags.

Ensure your property has a Property Identification Code (PIC) registered with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) that indicates horses are there.

After the fire

Horses tend to recover well after a fire. They may suffer facial burns and their eyelids can be very swollen to the extent where they cannot open them. Appropriate treatment will soon restore them to full health.

A horse suffering from burns requires prompt veterinary attention but there are some ways to make them more comfortable until the vet arrives. Sponge affected areas with cold water. If legs are affected try standing your horse in a bucket of water to reduce pain and swelling. Any first-aid administered should be anti-inflammatory.

Personal safety during bushfire

Always put your own safety before the safety of your horses. While horses have a high chance of survival, many people have died during bushfires because they have been caught out in the open and have been exposed to the radiant heat of the fire.

Develop a personal Bushfire Survival Plan that will ensure your own safety. The safest option is for you to be well away from high risk areas on Severe, Extreme or Code Red fire danger days.

If you find yourself in an area threatened by fire do not stay out in the open. Seek shelter from radiant heat by:

- Going inside a building – preferably a well-prepared house.
- Wearing appropriate personal protective clothing made of natural fibres like long-sleeved overalls or a long-sleeved shirt and trousers made of cotton. On no account should synthetic materials be worn.

Further information about horses and bushfires

- DPI Agriculture Notes – *Horses and Bushfires Updated 2010* provides more comprehensive and detailed advice. Please go to www.dpi.vic.gov.au to download.
- Australian Horse Industry Council www.horsecouncil.org.au

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PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

FireReady The logo for FireReady Victoria, with the word 'FireReady' in a large, bold, sans-serif font and the word 'Victoria' in a smaller font to the right, accompanied by a small map of Victoria.