



Horses in bushfires

It is essential that all horse owners and carers are familiar with how to care for your horses during emergency situations, including bushfires, and how to develop a plan to protect them.

Caring for horses before a fire begins

Paddocks

Horse owners can take steps to make their paddocks safer by limiting vegetation in the area so there is less fuel for the fire to burn. Paddocks should also have a large water supply, like a dam, and be big enough that your horse can easily escape flames as they pass.

All internal gates in the paddock should be left open, but they should not be able to get onto the road as this could put emergency services personnel and others at risk and the horses could be in more danger.

Bushfire survival plan for horses

It is important to have a plan in place to determine what you will do with your horses before a fire starts. Once a fire is already approaching your property, it is unlikely that you will be able to safely move your horses. On days with a high fire danger rating you should practise floating your horse, having other people catch, halter and float your horse, move your horse around the property so they know where internal gates are and remove all flammable items including rugs, fly veils, boots, halters and head collars.

If an extreme fire weather announcement is made you should consider moving your horses to a safer location nearby.



Areas to temporarily move your horse include:

- a neighbour or friend's property that is safer than yours
- local showgrounds
- saleyards
- racetracks
- pony club grounds.

Prepare your horses

Make sure your horses are easily identifiable by microchipping or branding them. If your horse is not chipped or branded, write your name and phone number on your horse - preferably with a grease crayon. Make sure you have a photo with you and your horses in case you need to prove ownership.



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Caring for horses during and after bushfires

During a bushfire

Once a bushfire starts visibility is poor and travelling can become dangerous. Horses can panic in a float filled with smoke or when around the loud noises of sirens, which is why it is important to move or prepare horses before the fire is close.

If it is unsafe to move the horses and they are left in a large paddock, they should have plenty of water and three days worth of food. However, they may suffer minimal burns from galloping through flames or around a fire's edge and from standing on previously burnt areas that are still hot.

After the fire front has passed and it is safe, check on your horses to reassure them and calm them down. If they do have burns, call a vet and start to administer any treatments or medicines you have on hand before the vet arrives. This could include:

- sponging affected areas with cold water
- if legs are affected, try to stand your horse in a bucket of cold water
- anti-inflammatory first-aid.

Continue to monitor your horses over the next few days as some symptoms can take a while to appear.

After the fire

Care must be taken when returning horses to burnt areas after a bushfire as there may still be hotspots which could burn the hooves or legs of your horse.

Check for the following before re-entering a burnt area:

- partially burnt structures and trees which might be unstable or likely to fall
- tree roots which may burn underground creating hot pits that could cause burns if stepped in
- ensure water isn't contaminated with ash or firefighting foam and they have food off the ground
- bees and wasps as they may swarm when trying to establish a new home

- fencing is safe and free from breaks and sharp edges
- electric fences for faults and breakages.

Forward planning can be the biggest asset when trying to protect the safety and wellbeing of your horses if you live in a high-risk bushfire area.

Have a written plan and practice!

For more information, visit these resources:

- cfs.sa.gov.au/site/resources/fact_sheet_library.jsp
- cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/horses-and-bushfires
- plantagenet.wa.gov.au/pdf/horses_and_bushfires.pdf
- horsesawarehouse.org.au/emergency/bushfire-information/



With your family and horses safety in mind, visit the ruralfire.qld.gov.au/BushFire_Safety/Pages/Create-your-bushfire-survival-plan.aspx to complete your bushfire survival plan.

