

# Horses and livestock in emergencies

**Your animals are your responsibility. Failing to plan ahead for your animals during an emergency puts everyone's lives at risk. The following information will help you prepare to ensure the welfare of your horses and livestock during emergency events, such as bushfires or floods.**

## Plan ahead

- Prepare an emergency plan that covers major disasters which have the potential to impact on your family and your animals. Planning should include decisions about which animals to evacuate and which to leave behind, identification of evacuation routes from your property, and research into emergency accommodation options with facilities for animals. Discuss your plan, record it, and practice it. Refer to the Country Fire Authority for guidance on developing a bushfire survival plan ([www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)).
- Prepare an emergency/disaster kit for your animals and place it in a prominent place. Depending on the type of animal, a kit might include: 2-3 days of feed, water, halters, leads, rugs, a first aid kit, medications and relevant documentation.
- Ensure your animals always have a water supply that will last them at least 5 days, even if you expect to be home that evening.
- Prepare a list of family, friends, animal shelters or other potential location that is away from any fire danger, that may provide suitable accommodation for your animals. Emergency relief centres may have facilities for animals or councils may have set up specific locations where animals can be taken, check with your council as to their emergency animal welfare plans.
- For animals that you plan to take with you when evacuating your property in an emergency, practice leading and loading them into a trailer or float. Have equipment close at hand that may be needed such as halters and lead ropes. Practice hitching your trailer and backing it into the loading area. Check brakes and air in tyres on a regular basis. If possible, back your vehicle into your driveway facing the exit, in front of your trailer.



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- Ensure your animal identification is up to date. Microchip and register horses on a licensed registry. For livestock, ensure your National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) and Property Identification Code (PIC) details and, where appropriate, your insurance records are up to date (and put copies in your emergency kit).
- Ensure your animals' vaccinations are up to date (where applicable).
- If you have agisted animals on the property or your animals are agisted elsewhere, ensure that emergency plans are in place for all animals. Talk to animal owners or landowners to develop and agree on appropriate actions.
- Determine how you will maintain containment (e.g. fencing) and the provision of food, water and shelter for your animals after an emergency has passed.

## Prepare a low risk area on your property in case of bushfire

Not all animals may be able to be evacuated. However, you can improve their chances of survival by preparing a safer area they can be moved to in the event of an emergency.

### Low risk areas:

- May be cultivated paddocks with no vegetation, bared-out paddocks (minimal vegetation), green paddocks or a large, well fenced sand ménage.
- Should be centrally located and easy to access. Strategically placed, they can act as a bushfire barrier as well as a low risk area that animals can be moved to early on high fire danger days.
- Shouldn't be next to areas of scrub or bushland or, if unavoidable, at least large enough in size to allow animals to move well away from these areas. Farms with large numbers of animals may need to manage several low risk areas on the property. It is important to remember low risk areas must be available at all times during the fire season and at short notice.
- Should have sufficient drinking water to enable stock to remain in this area during periods of high to extreme temperatures for several days; and be protected by firebreaks and free of leaf, twig and bark build-up.



## Evacuating with animals

- Know which evacuation routes you will take to reach evacuation sites. Call ahead to your pre-arranged evacuation site to let them know you are coming. If you don't have a pre-arranged evacuation site for your animals, head to your local council evacuation location and request further information when you get there.
- Allow enough time to act – stay aware of possible emergencies, especially when severe or extreme weather events may cause flash flooding, or when a fire warning has been issued. Decide what you are going to do as early as possible.
- Prepare and attach identification information to each of your animals so you can be contacted should you be separated.
- Load your animals for transport, and pack your animal evacuation kit into your vehicle along with any additional supplies you feel you might need. Don't forget your smaller animals or pets, ensure you have an emergency kit for them and they are identified and can be contained safely (lead, carry cage etc).
- The safest option is to leave early on high fire risk days. On a Code Red bushfire day you must leave the night before or early in the morning. Late evacuation can be a deadly option.

## Animals remaining on the property

- Ensure your hazard reduction is complete on and around the property and your low risk area is ready to go.
- Move your animals to your designated low risk area. Sheep often refuse to move once conditions get very hot, so they should be moved early in the day.
- Fill water troughs and put out sufficient feed. Remember that you may not be able to return to your property for several days, so at least five days of water and food should be left.
- Prepare and leave instructions on your animals' care and where equipment can be found (including first aid supplies) in case someone else needs to care for them.
- It isn't recommended to shut horses in stables or small yards unless the area is well protected from bushfire. Horses are likely to receive only minimal burns if given plenty of room to move. They will gallop through flames or around their edges, and stand on the blackened, previously burnt area and remain there until the fire has passed.
- Don't leave synthetic (nylon or plastic) equipment, including rugs, on animals. These can melt and cause serious burns. Radiant heat can also cause metal

buckles to become hot and cause burns to animals. Leather halters and cotton lead ropes, while generally not as strong as nylon, are safer than synthetic.

- Fences along roadsides should NOT be cut. Loose stock can cause accidents during fire, particularly when visibility is low due to smoke haze, and can be difficult to manage after the fire front passes. Gates within a property can be opened but not gates onto roadways.
- Where the property is in danger of flooding, move all stock to the highest areas of the property away from water sources and flood plains. If possible provide a source of supplementary food (such as a hay roll) and water in an area least likely to flood, and consider opening gates to allow animals to move to dry ground.

## After the emergency

- If your animals are injured seek veterinary treatment immediately.
- If your animals are lost, notify your local council, microchip registry, neighbours and nearby animal shelters. You can also check social media sources (often in emergencies a site is set up to list lost and found animals).



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## Checklist

- Are your pets, horses and livestock included in your emergency planning?
- Are all your animals identified, and that microchip / NLIS / PIC details are current?
- Have you determined which animals will be evacuated in an emergency, and which will be left behind?
- Have you prepared your animal emergency plan and disaster kit and placed it in a prominent place? The kit may include food, water, halters, leads, rugs, first aid supplies, medications and relevant documentation.
- Have you determined which evacuation routes are available and safe in an emergency?
- Are the animals that you plan to evacuate accustomed to travel, and are your transport vehicles well maintained?
- Have you identified the site where you will evacuate your animals to? Have you checked with your local council about evacuation options that include facilities for animals?
- Have you prepared and maintained a low risk area on your property for the animals you plan to leave behind on your property?
- Have you removed equipment that may burn animals during a bushfire, such as horse rugs and synthetic halters?
- If your animals have to be left behind during an emergency, do they have access to at least 5 days of food and water?
- Have you determined how you will manage containment or fencing, food, water and shelter for animals after a fire?
- Do you have equipment easily accessible to provide emergency first aid to animals after the fire?

## For more information go to -

[www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies)  
or call 136 186.

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