

HORSES IN BUSHFIRES

As a horse owner or carer, it's essential you are familiar with how to care for horses during emergency situations and develop a plan to protect them. Forward planning can be the biggest asset when trying to protect the safety and wellbeing of your horses.

Prepare your paddocks

Make paddocks safer by limiting vegetation in the area so there is less fuel for a fire to burn. Make sure there is a large water supply, such as a dam and the paddock area is big enough so horses can easily escape flames as they pass.

All internal gates in fencing should be left open so horses can move freely, but should not allow your horses to exit your property or access the road where they could become a hazard for emergency services personnel and other vehicles.

Include your horses in your Bushfire Survival Plan

Make sure your [Bushfire Survival Plan](#) includes what you will do to protect your horses. Once a fire is already approaching your property, it's unlikely you will be able to safely move them.

If you plan to relocate your horses, do so well before any smoke and fire arrives. If an extreme fire weather announcement is made you should consider moving your horses.

Make arrangements with safer locations nearby such as:

- » 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 horses are not chipped or branded, write your name and phone number on them with a grease crayon. Make sure you have a photo of yourself with your horses in case you need to prove ownership.

On days with a high fire danger rating, consider preparing your horse by:

- » practising floating your horse,
- » practising other people catching, haltering and floating your horse

- » moving your horse around the property so they know where internal gates, and
- » removing all flammable from your horses such as rugs, fly veils, boots, halters and head collars.

Do not lock your horses in a stable, holding yard or similar environment. A horse's natural instinct is to run from danger. They may injure themselves if they are confined, and the structure itself could catch fire.

Caring for horses during a bushfire

Move or prepare your horses before a fire approaches. Once a bushfire starts, visibility is poor and travelling can become dangerous. Horses can panic in a float filled with smoke or when around loud noises such as sirens.

If it's unsafe to move your horses and they are left in a paddock, supply plenty of water and at least three days worth of food. Be aware 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
- » standing your horse in a bucket of cold water if their legs are affected
- » anti-inflammatory first-aid.

After a bushfire

Take care when returning horses to burnt areas. Check for the following before re-entering a burnt area:

- » hotspots on the ground that could cause burns to hooves and legs.
- » 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
- » that water isn't contaminated with ash or firefighting foam and food is raised off the ground
- » bees and wasps that may swarm when trying to establish a new home
- » fencing is safe and free from breaks and sharp edges.

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