

SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

If fires are the “new normal,” horse savvy preparation must be part of that new reality.

by Alice Chan

Living in California—especially in the north or south—it’s hard to deny that we have an established pattern of wildfires that make it scary to own a horse in the late Fall. Many of us have now experienced two or three years in a row, faced with the prospect of evacuation, or worse: having to open gates to give your horse the best chance of survival, and run, with fire at your heels.

So, what’s a responsible equestrian to do? How can you best prepare yourself and your horse for this seemingly annual occurrence? Here are a few tips and tricks that I’ve picked up along the way both from owning horses in fire danger areas, and also from helping to care for evacuated horses at Petaluma and Santa Rosa Fairgrounds in Sonoma County.



1. Have a disaster plan

Does your barn have an evacuation plan? If so, ask for a copy and if not, ask the barn owners to create one and share it widely. Do you have all your horse’s papers in one place, readily on

Written by by Alice Chan

Sunday, 01 December 2019 09:16

hand? Do you have good, clear photos of your horse and any distinguishing markings? Consider creating a laminated card with your contact information, a photo of your horse and your vet's phone number, to hang on a stall at an evacuation center.

2. Make sure your horse will load in a trailer easily

Trailer loading is a basic but crucial skill for you and your horse to have. When crunch-time comes, you may not have 30-40 minutes to load a scared horse, so use the rainy season to practice loading until it's second nature for both of you.



3. Make sure your horse is microchipped

You've no doubt seen harrowing Facebook posts from owners looking for their horses in the aftermath of a fire, or rescuers trying to find owners. Ensuring your horse is microchipped and the registered owner and address on file is up-to-date, will give you some peace of mind and make it easier to reunite you with your horse should the worst case scenario occur.

4. Weave an I.C.E. tag into the mane

As disasters become more prevalent, there are some neat gadgets that have come onto the market to help ensure your horse is readily identifiable In Case of Emergency (ICE). I particularly like the I.C.E. ManeStay Equine Emergency ID tag which can be clipped into a braid in the horse's mane. I bought mine from ValleyVet.com. For me, this is preferable to leaving on a halter which can easily get caught on something and cause an accident.



5. Keep your vaccinations up-to-date

During my time volunteering at the fairgrounds, I've seen a lot of horses that are usually kept at

Written by by Alice Chan

Sunday, 01 December 2019 09:16

home and don't go out and about. Keeping up-to-date on vaccinations will protect your horse in the event that it does have to be housed at an evacuation center in close quarters with other equines.

6. In the worst case scenario

If you find yourself in the awful position of not having the time to haul your horse to a safe place, and you can do this without endangering yourself, make sure you open your horse's stall door or paddock gate to give him or her the best chance of survival. They will, amazingly often, find the one spot the fire doesn't burn if they are free to run. Never ever padlock the door or gate. There have been tragic outcomes for horses that were locked in their living quarters and no one on site had the key.

We are all fervently hoping these crazy fires are not the new normal, but either way, being prepared for the worst is definitely a good idea.

Author Alice Chan is based in Northern California. When she's not riding or being a show mom to her son Benjamin, an accomplished young eventer, she continues her work as the founder of the Flock Marketing Collective.