

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE

Your decision to remove your horse to a place of greater safety, or organise for them to stay safely where they are, is not one you should take at the last minute when a fire is upon you. You should decide well ahead of the bushfire season what will trigger your decision for your horse to stay or go. Last minute, ill-prepared decisions may cost you your life or result in permanent injury. With advance planning and preparation horses can survive a fire without human assistance.

This information is provided to help you improve bushfire preparations, thereby increasing your capacity to act and survive each bushfire season. Stay alert, seek out information and take responsibility for you and your horse.

1. Be Informed
2. Will Your Horse Go or Stay?
3. First Aid For Horses

1. Be Informed

Be weather alert during bushfire season. Regularly check for New Alerts on the ACT Emergency Service Agency's website: <http://esa.act.gov.au>. Be aware of:-

- o High wind forecasts
- o Storm forecasts, especially electrical storms
- o Total Fire Bans
- o The existence and behaviour of fires in close proximity to your horse agistment
- o Media broadcasts, especially ABC radio and local community radio stations for emergency information.

Fire Danger Ratings have changed. Understand Fire Danger Ratings (FDRs) issued by the ACT Emergency Services Agency(ESA) to help you determine the level of risk each day of the fire season. See this [AFDRS Factsheet](#) for information about the new Fire Danger Ratings.



A real time map of current fires and their status is at <https://esa.act.gov.au> and <https://esa.act.gov.au/cbr-be-emergency-ready/bushfire-ready/bushfire-warning-messages>. You can access updates through Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/actemergencyservicesagency>, Twitter https://twitter.com/ACT_ESA and download the app Fires Near Me which

provides information on current incidents throughout the ACT and surrounding region <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fires-near-me> .

Another real time source of accurate local information is the ACT & Surrounds Equine Rescue Facebook which is closely allied with the NSW RFS <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2186584474901589>.

2. Will Your Horse Stay or Go?

Going

The safest place for humans and horses is **AWAY** from areas of high fire risk. If you are concerned about fires then consider removing yourself and your horse to a safer, prearranged location for the duration of the Extreme and above fire danger period. If you decide to move your horse, identify the trigger for you to go early. Late evacuation is a deadly option.

Once the fire is close, smoke and flying embers will reduce visibility and make travelling extremely hazardous. Fallen trees or power lines and abandoned vehicles may block roads. Even quiet horses may panic if they are separated from their mates and asked to load onto a float by tense and worried handlers in adverse weather conditions with high winds, flying embers, and smoke.

Plans to evacuate your horse early should include:-

- An agreed predetermined trigger such as the declaration of an Extreme fire rating, (a Total Fire Ban will automatically apply at this level) or the announcement of a forthcoming Catastrophic fire danger day;
- Having a well prepared, well equipped, roadworthy float/truck, tow vehicle and experienced driver readily available;
- A well trained horse that will reliably load on to a float;
- An estimate of how long it will take to hitch up your float, drive to your paddock, load your horse(s) and leave. Factor this time period into your evacuation plan and do a dry run. Consider making your float readily accessible by taking it home on Total Fire Ban days;
- An alternative route away from the paddock. Even if you leave early, it is possible that your usual route may be blocked.
- A predetermined safer place to take your horse;
- A joint plan with other horse owners to share the responsibility for getting horses off the property;
- Only taking another horse if you have agreed with the owner, have room, and are confident that horse reliably loads and travels and only returning for another horse if it is safe do to so;
- Having an arrangement with someone else to get your horse out if you are away on the crucial day;
- Making sure any friends or family who assist you are familiar with your plans and procedures, especially if they are not used to horses.
- Keeping friends and family informed of your intentions and progress.

It does not matter if you end up evacuating your horse several times over the fire season. A false alarm is safer than being caught in a bushfire.

Relocation Centres

The ACT Rural Fire Service reinforce that your life, and that of your family and friends, must be your first consideration and priority. Removing your horse/s from the

area altogether, or activating your paddock fire plan as early as possible, should be your primary course of action.

If you are on a property that has no safer area, or you have no alternative accommodation, then relocating to a safer area might be your only option. In event of a bushfire emergency that threatens any of the ACT horse paddocks ACT Emergency Service Agency will **publicly notify** areas to which horses can be removed. If EPIC is open to receive horses they will notify this on their website <http://www.exhibitionparkincanberra.com>. If EPIC is unavailable the ESA will advise alternative destinations. You will have to be entirely self sufficient at public relocation centres.

Relocation Kits

Prepare and store an evacuation kit in an easily accessible location and place another kit in your float. Only use it for emergencies and check and test equipment regularly. Label and load a metal rubbish bin (with lid) with the following:

- wire/bolt cutters and a sharp knife
- hands-free torch, portable radio and fresh batteries
- water bucket
- extra lead rope and head collar made of natural fibres
- woollen blanket and towels
- equine first aid items
- whatever else you feel is essential for the first 24 hours e.g. feed and water if evacuating
- fire resistant clothing and equipment for you and those identified to help you.

You may also want to consider keeping an evacuation kit in the boot of your car.

Staying

First and most importantly decide whether it is safer for your horse to stay where it is if there is a bushfire. This decision should be based on whether:

- There is a well thought out and practical property fire plan that has been revised for this season. Horse Agistment Managers in the ACT are required to have a bushfire management plan that covers agisted stock along with other property assets, stock and dwellings. Find out what plans your horse agistment managers have in place for the best safety options for the horses on their property.
- The actions and expectations of owners, agistees and horses are clearly spelt out in the fire plan? Many horse agistment managers welcome a cooperative approach to planning and implementation of a fire plan. You need to respect their wishes about your involvement in the event of a fire.
- There is either a safer, low fuel, area in the paddock where horses can shelter from fire, or designated safer areas on the property where horses will be moved before the fire arrives, such as indoor arenas, sand arenas, colourbond sheds, contained bare paddocks or metal yards, all with ample water?
- Surrounding areas, including buildings, roofs, gutters and fence lines have been cleared of flammable material such as rubbish, hay, horse rugs, sawdust piles, manure piles, long grass and with clear access to gates and doorways?

- Is there a designated safer place where people can shelter from fire if they find they cannot leave?
- There is a communication system and a cache of human and animal first aid supplies and you know how to use them.

Be Part of A Paddock Plan

Do not assume that you will be with your horse when a fire is coming. Under no circumstances should you go back to rescue your horse once a fire has taken hold. Never put your life and the lives of others at risk. If you are well prepared and have acted with enough time to follow your fire plan, your horse's chances of surviving uninjured without you are high. Remember that horses in a familiar herd, in a familiar paddock or safer area with reduced fuel levels are more likely to survive a fast moving grass fire. Providing you are uninjured and it is safe to do so, you can provide assistance and any necessary first aid to your horse once the fire has passed.

A mutually agreed paddock plan outlining the actions to be taken in Extreme or above fire danger periods is vital for the safety and peace of mind of everyone involved with your paddock. A good plan depends on regular communication, mutual agreement, and clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each horse owner. Consider the following when formulating a paddock plan:

- Hold regular meetings prior to the bushfire period to discuss and revise contingency plans and establish ahead of time who will check on and help whom and which resources will be shared;
- Decide if the fuel load in your paddock is low enough for the horses to stay where they are; if not decide where they will be moved to and when;
- Discuss and share your plan with the property owners;
- Create a list of current contact details;
- Plan to contact paddock owners on Extreme or above fire danger days. Place all your paddock mates on speed dial and have an alternative to phone contact if needed;
- Have an agreed plan in case some owners are away or unable to be contacted;
- Collect descriptions of each of the horses in the paddock;
- Permanently identify horses. Micro chipped, branded or otherwise identified horses will be more speedily reunited with their owners if separation occurs. It is a good idea to 'paint' your name and phone number on the horse itself using livestock grease crayons (like the ones used to number endurance horses), permanent marker pen, or paint on hooves. This may be crucial if your horse is likely to be looked after by strangers.
- Agree about who is authorised to take responsibility for horses whose owners can't be there on the day, including who will be responsible for removing any gear from the paddock horses on high fire days;
- Have a working bee to reduce fuel loads in sheds and around yards and fencing;
- Identify water sources – e.g. hoses, troughs, tanks, and keep water containers filled;
- Organise a fire fighting kit and an equine first aid kit to be kept at or near the paddock;

- Consider buying, and practice using, UHF CB radios to communicate with each other. This is especially important if you are alone and your paddock is isolated from the rest of the property

ACT Government Horse Paddocks will have their own specific bushfire plan for horses that will be staying . Make sure you are familiar with this plan which can be accessed on the Territory Agistment website

at <https://territoryagistment.com.au/perch/resources//1573530624fireresponsestrategydec2013.pdf>.

Practice your Paddock Plan

High Fire Danger Days

On every Extreme and above fire day horse owners should do the following:

- Visit their horses early in the day before winds get up and the temperature is lowest – not in the hottest part of the day;
- Remove all fly veils, synthetic halters and rugs and metal objects from your horse, or authorise someone to do it for you;
- Ensure your horse has access to your previously identified ‘safer’ area which may mean opening internal gates. Show the whole herd that the gates are open;
- Do not move horses into a foreign paddock at the last minute unless it is a contained, fuel reduced area and they go as a herd as part of the fire plan;
- Know which horses from a paddock have already been evacuated;
- Ensure there is access to water – don’t rely on hoses or automatic mechanisms;
- If you are shifting fractious horses when a fire is very close move the paddock leaders first and the others will be keen to follow; a temporary blindfold over the eyes may help;
- Do not cut fences onto public roads;
- Shut gates and stable doors behind you to stop panicked horses from returning and becoming trapped;
- Be ready to see to your horse and render first aid after the fire front has passed

If You Cannot Leave How Will You Manage During a Fire?

It is possible that despite your best efforts you are taken by surprise by a fire front. The main fire-front usually passes relatively quickly (10 – 20 minutes in bush land and a few minutes for grass fires). There is little you can do during this time. Put on protective gear from your fire kit immediately. Try to remain calm and alert, think clearly and act decisively; co-operate with firefighters and other emergency services. Go to shelter or to already burned ground. Do not put your life in additional danger by trying to save your horse; if it has a chance to move in open space, your horse will cope well on its own.

Clothing

The right clothes can help shield you from radiant heat, burning embers and flames. Keep the following in your car during the fire season and consider keeping a set in a drum stored where your horses are kept:

- Long pants, a long-sleeved cotton shirt or a woollen jumper, and a wide brimmed hat. Natural fabrics are essential. Synthetics can melt and cause serious burns;
- Sturdy leather gloves, while cumbersome, are essential to protect your hands from the effects of radiant heat, leather boots with a good tread are a safe footwear choice. Tennis shoes or rubber shoes will melt. You can buy high temperature soled boots;
- A mask or a cotton scarf, handkerchief to wear 'bandit-style' or cotton nappy to shield your nose and face from the effects of smoke and ash;
- Goggles to help protect your eyes from smoke and burning embers;

A word to the wise: condition your horse to your strange appearance ahead of time!

3. First Aid for Horses

Advice on first aid for fire affected horses is available at: <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/horses/health-and-welfare/assessing-horses-after-bushfires>.

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Main, Nicola 2010. *Hightailing into the fires: Bushfire planning on ACT horse agistment centres*, <http://esa.act.gov.au/community-information/bushfires/horses-and-bushfire/>, ACT Rural Fire Service website, NSW Rural Fire Service website, and was developed in consultation with the then ACT Rural Fire Service, Rural Liaison Officer, Dave Inskeep and ACT Chief Veterinarian, Dr Will Andrew. Valuable assistance in drafting was provided by the late Sandra Burr.

Please remember that this document, and the advice provided is just that, advice. The information provided has been gathered from research undertaken in the ACT as well as from those with experience but it cannot protect you or your horse/s against all bushfire situations and should not be viewed as all there is to know and do.