



STATE OF FLORIDA

# DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

CHARLIE CRIST  
Governor

RUBEN D. ALMAGUER  
Interim Director

## Hurricane Preparedness for Horse Owners: Get a Plan!

By: Shanti Smith

Florida Division of Emergency Management officials constantly stress that all individuals, families, and businesses should "Get a Plan" and this is the central feature of the Division's website. When preparing your personal and family disaster plans, it is essential to also include your pets and livestock in those plans. Many families impacted by Hurricane Andrew did not plan for their pets and it resulted in unclaimed and unrecovered horses following landfall in south Florida. To alleviate this problem following Hurricane Katrina, Florida's State Agricultural Response Team (SART) deployed to Hattiesburg, Mississippi to assist the Mississippi State Veterinarian with recovery and treatment of the hundreds of thousands of animals that were loose and unclaimed.

Most hurricanes are carefully monitored and tracked long before they make landfall. Thus, residents and visitors have some prior knowledge of the anticipated location of impact. For horse owners, the first decision to make is whether or not to evacuate. As a basic rule of thumb, if you live more than 50 miles from the coast you are recommended to remain at home, rather than put your horse through the stress of a trailer ride in heavy evacuation traffic. However, the more severe the storm, the more attention must be paid to the forecasted impact area.

Below are some helpful tips for preparing your farm and horses for a storm and for recovering after landfall:

### If you live within 50 mile of the coast, where do you go?

If you live in the State of Florida, you should contact the Sunshine State Horse Council (<http://www.sshc.org>) to find farms or horse shelter facilities outside of the anticipated impact area that are willing to accept evacuees. Learn where they are and how to reach them. If outside the State of Florida, check with your State's Department of Agriculture for the equivalent.

- You should have three farms lined up each season so you always have a back-up facility.
- Keep Coggins records and Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection handy and safe with other important paperwork.
- Leave at least 72 hours before hurricane-force winds are expected.

Winds greater than 40 mph are dangerous, especially when pulling a trailer and first responders are not allowed to respond until the winds recede below 40 mph.

Additionally, evacuees with horses must often travel quite a distance to reach a facility that has space available. Many of the facilities listed on the Sunshine State Horse Council site are facilities with borders or activities that often fill most available space. *It always better to check availability by phone if possible.*

**If you choose to stay and ride it out or live more than 50 miles from the coast:**

- Take Polaroid pictures of each horse with its owner, or print out digital pictures as there may not be electricity for some time following landfall.
- Remove or secure items that can be blown by strong winds and cause injury to horses
- Label your horses with your name, phone number and perhaps the number of someone outside of the storm area in case there is no cell phone service or land line available after the storm. Label the horses using a luggage tag on the halter, ID tags from a pet store, microchips, brands/tattoos, by clipping a phone number into the coat or with spray paint (it will come off eventually and can't fall off the horse during the storm).
- Do not house your horses in barns that are not extremely sturdy, (e.g. cinderblock with shingle roof).
- Keep horses out of flood-prone pastures. Open gates to allow horses to go to higher ground.
- People are not the only creatures displaced by hurricanes. Water moccasin snakes are more likely to be in flooded pastures. Many other snakes and fire ants move to higher ground so be aware of your surroundings for your safety and for that of your horse.
- Always turn off the power to the barn and do not put horses in pastures which have overhead power lines.
- Ensure you have 12-18 gallons of water per horse per day available after the storm passes. Be prepared with a generator for the well. Line large garbage cans and store water in them as water containers.
- Pasture appropriate horses together; mares with foals will be extremely protective during times of stress and should be kept together. Likewise, geldings with other geldings and stallions separated and far removed.

**After the storm has passed:**

- Walk perimeter of the pasture and make sure fences are intact and the animals are still contained.
- Be prepared to triage animals. Those most likely to survive should be treated first. If a horse is injured, apply pressure to excessive bleeding. Keep all wounds clean and hose out with water, if available. Be aware of Tetanus Toxoid and seek veterinary care, but also be aware that, in the event of a large-scale impact it can be days or weeks before a veterinarian may be able to reach you, due to impassable roads and flooding.
- If you evacuate with your horse, realize that emergency situations may require rapid changes in management practices and feedstuff. Monitor your horses for signs of colic (flank watching, biting, rolling) and laminitis (reluctance to move due to sore feet). These may be associated with changes to environment.

**Remember: the more prepared you are, the better the chance for survival!**

**Additional Resources:**

Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART): <http://www.flsart.org/SART/tm?pageID=2#>

Preparing to Evacuate your farm when flooding is expected:  
<http://www.nasdonline.org/docs/d001401-d001500/d001487/d001487.html>

FEMA Course: Livestock in Disasters: <http://training.fema.gov/emiWeb/IS/is1111.asp>

Helping four-legged friends survive the storm (University of Florida Video):  
<http://www.nasdonline.org/videos/v001401-v001500/v001438.html>

Sunshine State Horse Council – Evacuation Resources: <http://www.sshc.org/>

University of Florida IFAS Disaster Handbook: <http://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu/>

World Organization for Animal Health: [http://www.oie.int/eng/en\\_index.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm)

Disaster Planning Tips for Pets, Livestock and Wildlife (HSUS):  
<http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov/factsheets/PlanningTipsPetsLivestockWildlife.htm>