

# Being Prepared for Weather Disasters



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In 2010, more than half of the United States, from Texas to Maine, was engulfed in a major winter storm. Millions of people were without power, road/highway access, or viable communications. Loss of electricity, impassable roads, and breaks in communications can, however, happen in any climate, at any time, due to floods, straightline winds, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. The start of a new year is a good time to review farm disaster plans. Planning will help keep family, employees, and horses safe in the event of a weather disaster.

Human health and safety must come first, so having a family disaster plan should precede preparation of horse facilities. At [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) you will find a wealth of resources on family disaster preparedness. Information on business disaster planning is available at <http://www.ready.gov>.

Water and electricity are major considerations. Water is essential to the health of horses, especially when they can drink 8-12 gallons per day. Do not expect a horse to be able to get its required water intake by eating snow, even if there is plenty around. A loss of electricity means no lighting in the barn, but sometimes more importantly, no power can cause several problems related to horses' water intake. First, without power, you cannot pump well water, which might be horses' only water source. Second, automatic waterers are run on electricity, which means that without power, you will have to use buckets or water tanks. Third, water pipes can freeze if pipe-heating tape is no longer powered. Finally, to encourage horses to drink more volume in winter, water should be maintained at 45-65°F, which can be a problem without electricity.

Because loss of electricity can cause significant problems for farms at any time of year, it's essential to have a backup generator along with the knowledge of how to properly run and maintain it. Carbon monoxide toxicity from running generators is a very real threat. Fuel is of course also required. As farmers in ice-coated western Kentucky learned in 2009, generators do little good after the fuel source (and supply) runs out. Make a plan for safely storing generator fuel, and contact neighbors so you can share resources if need be.

All people on the farm should know how to turn off the water, electricity, and other utilities to buildings in case of burst pipes, power outages, or fire hazards.

If a frozen pond is in a field where horses are kept, the animals should be moved to another pasture or if at all possible, moved into a barn. All too often animals will walk onto the frozen ice and snow only to break through and fall into the freezing water. Dangerous water rescues of horses in these circumstances can be prevented by fencing off ponds prior to winter. Temporary fencing materials should be kept on hand for this use as well as for repairs to downed fencing.

With roads closed due to ice, downed trees, and debris, transportation on and off a farm could be shut down for weeks at a time. If weekly deliveries of feed are required, make plans to stockpile at least two weeks of feed in rodent-proof containers. Several weeks' worth of hay should be kept on hand, even more in very cold weather areas.

Emergency managers know well that communication capabilities are often the first services to be compromised during and after disasters. Telephone lines and cell towers might be downed during severe weather or cellular service may be overwhelmed, so that calls cannot go through. Having a car charger for a cell phone is a necessity in case power is interrupted. You may need to call on neighbors for assistance, request emergency help, or get veterinary advice for a sick horse by phone when roads are closed. Ham radio operators in the area are another means of emergency communication.

Keeping the barn perimeter free of debris is not only tidy but reduces dangerous airborne projectiles in high winds and hidden, frozen tripping hazards to people and animals after winter storms.

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