



After a bushfire – tips for horse owners

DRAFT 05.01.2015

Contributions & further ideas for this checklist are welcome e: horsesa@horsesa.asn.au

Fire affected horses may require many months of rehabilitation. Historical records show that more horses die after a fire than during the event itself. Fire affected horses may not show signs or symptoms for up to eight weeks afterwards, or affected horses may display secondary problems including colic and toxic poisoning.

It is important to seek advice from a veterinarian for horse health and a land management expert for land health. Some tips below are of a general nature.

HORSE HEALTH

Horses must be checked every day and given a thorough inspection. Many fire-injured horses take weeks or even months to display symptoms. Common health issues include smoke inhalation, burns, laminitis, dehydration and secondary renal failure. Burns can be superficial or deep.

Horse owners must know what is 'normal' and report any abnormalities to your vet. Symptoms will vary widely according to the type of exposure to the fire the horse experienced and the length of time of exposed. Horses may also be in shock.

FIRST AID

Similar to people, first aid involves initial cooling, followed by pain management and topical creams and ointments. It is highly recommended that veterinarians assess horses, in order that a thorough examination can take place. A treatment plan will be established to suit each horse.

NURSING

Fire affected horses may require many months of daily nursing regimes. In consultation with your veterinarian, burns can be managed but will require consistent care and strong commitment. Nursing skills associated with horse handling, bandaging, flushing and debridement may be needed. Nutrition and a good general health status are essential to aid a full recovery.

HORSE MANAGEMENT

Horses may benefit from relocation out of the fire-ground, as hot earth, contaminated water, dust and ash could be present for many weeks, impeding recovery.

- Muzzles, mouths and throats may be sore. Soaking hay, dampening feeds and the type of diet are just a few things to consider
- Always have fresh, clean water close to where the horse is eating. They may wish to rinse out their mouth more often than usual
- Consider the height and placement of feed in relation to injuries the horse may have
- Shade and shelter are as important as always

LAND MANAGEMENT

- Take horses off of burnt land. It will be hot for many days afterwards, or even weeks, if roots are smouldering underground
- Walk paddocks with a fencing crowbar or similar to test for areas where the ground may give way. Observe paddocks for any other hazards as the wind ahead of a fire carries sticks, wire and other rubbish with it
- Trees may burn for weeks internally and drop limbs suddenly
- Report all found animals needing treatment to SAVEM, including natives
- Contamination is likely to occur with uncovered or unprotected water sources through ash, rubbish carried in the fire storm or carcasses e.g. birds

Longer term

- After the first rains weeds will grow, which may be new to your paddock. Some plants could be toxic to horses and livestock. Seek help to identify plants.
- Gifted hay may have brought new weeds to your area
- Pasture can take a year or more to establish. Plan not to graze new pasture until it is well established.

LINKS

- For horse health in the first instance, call your local vet
- Horse SA, for links useful for horse owners, www.horsesa.asn.au
- [Bushfires SA Assistance](#) Facebook page for longer term paddock lists, hay etc.
- PIRSA Stock Assessments for urgent vet advice or euthanasia 8207 7820
- Presentation by Dr. Chris Heislars on treating horses after 2009 Victorian bushfires (scroll down) <http://www.horsesa.asn.au/emergency/large-animal-rescue/>
- Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board Land management advisors www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/land/landholder-services
- SAVEM www.savem.org.au
- RSPCA www.rspca.org.au
- State Government Bushfire Information <https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/emergencies-and-safety/south-australian-bushfire-recovery>