

# Horses and bushfires

A GUIDE FOR HORSE OWNERS



[cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au)

## Do you have a plan?

You and your animals are at risk of fire if you live near, visit or agist in areas that are:

- heavily forested
- have thick bush or long, dry grass
- coastal areas.

Whether your horses are located at home or on an agistment property, you need to plan and prepare for their safety.

## Prepare a safe place for your horse

Horses are quite good at avoiding bushfire if two conditions are met:

- they are given enough room to move freely in a large open space
- there is minimal vegetation in the space.

A large, well-grazed paddock or a series of smaller paddocks with the internal gates left open would be suitable. Ideally it should have a dam where the horse can seek relief from the heat.

A large sand ménage can also be suitable if there are no buildings or vegetation that could catch fire.

On **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** fire danger days move your horses to your designated safer area.

Do not lock your horses in a stable, holding yard or similar environment as your horses may panic and hurt themselves if confined.

Do not let your horses out on roads, as they will be in more danger from traffic and fire.

A horse's natural instinct is to run from danger including bushfire and they will quickly move to burnt ground to survive.

## If your property isn't safe for your horse

You may wish to consider:

- agisting horses out of the area during summer
- making arrangements to temporarily move horses on **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** fire danger days.

Safer places for horses may be:

- a neighbour or friend's property
- local showgrounds
- saleyards
- racetracks
- pony club grounds.

You could get together with friends, other agistees or club members and arrange a group strategy. If you do agist your horse in a high fire-risk area, it's important to find out the property's bushfire plan.

## Before a fire threatens

If your plan is to move your horses to a safe location on hot, dry, windy days, you will need to move them well in advance of a fire starting. Once a fire starts, you won't be able to move them safely.

If you do wait until a fire has started before you leave, you risk the serious danger of driving through thick smoke, fallen trees and powerlines, and face the threat of collisions, being trapped or worse. Protect yourself and your animals by leaving early.

## Other considerations

On **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** fire danger days you should remove all gear from your horse as it could get caught on fences, melt or become very hot and cause serious burns. Don't leave rugs on your horse.

Permanently identify your horse. This could include branding but microchipping is preferred.

If your horse is difficult to catch you may consider leaving a leather halter on with identification tags.

Ensure your property has a property identification code (PIC) registered with Agriculture Victoria that indicates horses are on the property.

## Personal safety during bushfire

Always put your own safety before the safety of your horses. While horses have a high chance of survival, you are at risk of death from exposure to radiant heat. Ensure you wear protective clothing and drink water.

Develop a fire plan that will ensure your safety. The safest option is for you to be well away from high-risk bushfire areas on **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** fire danger days.

If you cannot leave the area consider shelter options close by that may protect you. These may include:

- a well-prepared home (yours or a neighbour's) that you can actively defend
- a private bunker (that meets current regulations)
- a designated Community Fire Refuge.

Last resort options could include:

- a Bushfire Place of Last Resort (Neighbourhood Safer Place)
- a stationary car in a cleared area
- a ploughed paddock or reserve
- a body of water (such as the beach, pool, dam or river). This does not include a water tank. Dams may not be reliable as their water levels fluctuate and they may be empty in summer.

Note that last resort options carry a high risk of trauma, injury or death.

## After the fire

Horses tend to recover well after a fire. Appropriate treatment will soon restore them to full health.

They may suffer facial burns and their eyelids can be very swollen to the extent where they cannot open them.



A horse suffering from burns requires prompt veterinary attention but there are some ways to make them more comfortable until the vet arrives.

Sponge affected areas with cold water. If legs are affected try standing your horse in a bucket of clean water to reduce pain and swelling.

## Further information

- Visit [agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au) and search for horses and bushfires for more detailed advice.
- Visit Rural Aid [ruralaid.org.au](http://ruralaid.org.au) for help after a fire.
- Bushfire safety and property preparation – CFA website [cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au)

## Where to find warnings and advice

- Check the **VicEmergency App** for up-to-date Fire Danger Rating and Total Fire Ban information, as well as warnings and the locations of current fires. Download the App for free for Apple and Android.
- Local news: listen to ABC Local Radio, commercial and designated community radio stations and watch Sky News TV.
- VicEmergency Hotline: **1800 226 226**.
- National Relay Service: callers who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech/communication impairment can contact the VicEmergency Hotline via the National Relay Service **1800 555 677**.
- VicEmergency: [emergency.vic.gov.au](http://emergency.vic.gov.au)
- Social Media: [facebook.com/cfavic](https://www.facebook.com/cfavic) twitter [@CFA\\_Updates](https://twitter.com/CFA_Updates)
- Interpreter **131 450**: If you do not speak English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service.