

# Fire Safety — 30 Seconds Is All Your Horse Has

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — Today's horse owner provides adequate training for horse and rider, proper equipment, balanced nutritional needs of the horse, and stabling facilities. Missing from books and lectures is a chapter on fire prevention and the course of action to take in case of fire.

Young people receive the best available instruction in equitation, but few have any idea of how to react in a disaster situation such as fire.

Fire is the most terrible death that can befall an animal, especially the horse, because the horse is penned securely within its corral and stable. The horse owner almost surely has committed to memory the telephone number of the veterinarian but does not know the number to dial in case of fire.

Fire prevention and safety are the duty of every person involved with and around horses. Many of the preventative measures apply whether the facility is at a track, a training barn, summer camp stable or backyard barn.

Fire safety involves common sense and a trained response. The responsibility of ownership does not lie solely in the daily care of the horse. The horse is totally dependent upon the owner's awareness and consideration of his needs when an emergency arises.

Be safety conscious at all times. Fires give little warning. Rehearse the necessary course of action to be followed with members of your family, your boarders, youth in training, and others directly involved with the animals in the barn in the event of fire.

Conspicuously post the number of the local fire department by all telephones. Fire preven-

tion is easier to preach than practice, but it is a vital part of horse ownership and management.

## Stable Fires

The official records of the National Fire Protection Association show that the majority of fires in stables (figures compiled from reported fires at racetracks, breeding farms and fairgrounds) are caused mainly by misuse of electrical apparatus, heaters and careless smoking. Other causes of fires are lightning, arson and spontaneous combustion.

Because more and more horse owners are moving out to a small acreage of their own and building their own stables and horse barns, this article will focus on the small scale horse facility.

Almost all horse barns have the following in common:

- Wood construction, either totally or partially;
- Bedding straw, sawdust or shavings in stalls;
- Storage of hay, bedding straw or shavings in close proximity to the barns;
- Highly combustible materials within (leather, blankets, ropes, oils and so forth); and
- People.

A horse standing in a bed of straw might just as well be standing in a pool of gasoline should a fire occur. The burning rate of loose straw is approximately three times that of the burning rate of gasoline.

The horse in a stall where the fire originates has only 30 seconds to escape. The flame spread and heat is so rapid that a fire, once started, is out of control in a matter of minutes.

These startling statistics dramatically emphasize the fact that a stable fire, once underway, does not give much time for evacuation of horses.

Automatic sprinkler systems are advocated for commercial facilities such as racetracks and large breeding establishments and other commercial-type enterprises. However, from a monetary point of view, automatic sprinkler systems generally are not included in the smaller scale operations.

Water-type fire extinguishers are effective if used within the first minute. Since stable fires develop rapidly due to the abundance of combustible materials, fire extinguishers are of little or no use once the fire has gained burning time (60 seconds).

Fire spreads rapidly, as does panic. Quick action is necessary to save the life of a horse. The person who is knowledgeable in the correct course of action will be more effective than five people in a panic state.

Fire prevention and safety should be taught along with basic equitation by trainers, organizations and parents. As schools have fire drills for the students, so should the barn manager and trainer instruct students in the course of action to follow in case of fire. Someone at your barn should be responsible for posting fire rules. The following procedures can help.

## Stable Construction

The majority of barns (training, boarding, rental and backyard) are constructed of combustible materials such as wood.

Brick, stone or cement-block barns are thought to be fairly fireproof, but exterior construction does not slow the internal spread of fire, which is fed by the highly combustible materials within (wood, straw, shavings, leather, tack, ropes, oils and so forth).

Fire retardant paints are most effective and desirable in

checking or retarding a fire, but of course they have no effect upon bedding materials used in stalls or the interior contents of the barn.

Building manufacturing companies now feature a line of prefabricated metal barns. In addition, there are also a number of companies that feature a complete line of metal corrals and fence panels. Overhead shelter installations used with these corrals also are of a lightweight metal. This type of installation offers the most as far as being "fireproof."

Overhead sprinkler systems, such as those developed exclusively for use in horse barns, are highly effective in extinguishing fires within barns. Unfortunately, this type of installation is very expensive and not in widespread use.

Thought should be given to installing extra large water lines with adequate outlets inside and outside the barn, all

equipped with large water hoses.

The type construction that allows air to flow freely to ventilate a stabling facility unfortunately aids in ventilating and fanning a fire.

In the interest of safety, all stalls should have outside doors whether or not there are adjoining paddocks. In the case of paddocks, they also should have outside gates.

Much can be done to diminish the ever constant threat of fire. The precautionary measures previously stated are common sense. Those who live and work around horses must know the proper actions to take in case of fire so the lives of individuals and horses and the loss of property can be minimized.

Due to the materials involved, it is doubtful there ever will be a "fireproof" barn, but certainly these basic steps will help reduce the threat of fire, if followed.

## Recommendations For Fire Prevention

1. Smoking in horse stalls, feed rooms and under sheds is prohibited.
2. No sleeping will be allowed in any of the feed rooms or stalls at any time.
3. Stalls occupied by horses will not be blocked at any time. Tack rooms will not be locked unless occupied.
4. No open fires will be allowed anywhere in the stable area.
5. No oil or gas burning lanterns or lamps will be allowed in the stable area.
6. All electrical appliances used in stable areas must be in a safe working condition. When in use, they must be kept at a safe distance from walls, beds and other furnishings. They should not be left unattended when in use.
7. No flammable materials, such as cleaning fluids or solvents, will be used in the stable area.
8. No hay or straw may be stored under the sheds or outside feed rooms at any time.
9. The alleyway in front of stalls must be kept free of debris and open at all times to give easy access to each stall door in case of fire.
10. All pets, such as dogs, cats, poultry, goats, and so forth, will not be allowed to run at large in the stable area but must be properly and suitably confined at all times.

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