

How Do You Spell Rescue?

If You Have Horses, the Answer is L-A-R

by Michelle Staples

Large Animal Rescue is a method of training used by emergency responders (especially firefighters) to extricate an animal from mechanical or natural entrapment. LAR training teaches how safely work with large, possibly injured animals; and how to keep the animals safe, as well. By using leverage, pulleys and straps, and knowing what parts of your horse's body will support being strapped and hauled, rescuers can avoid doing more damage to the horse than he has already incurred.

Experts agree that the most critical safety issue at the scene of a large animal incident is the responders' lack of knowledge of, and experience around, large animals. While emergency responders are trained to care for your life and your property, they are typically not trained to care for your animals. Most horse owners are shocked to learn this, but the focus of law enforcement and fire departments has always been on humans, with the occasional cat-in-a-tree or dog-in-a-drain rescue. While many of their skills and tools work for both animals and humans, they don't know enough to be safe around the animals and they end up injuring themselves, the animals and possibly bystanders.

As the guardian of your animals it is up to you to be aware of the dangers. The simple answer is to get proactive. Learn all you can about the safe methods available for rescuing your horse. When you understand that, take the information to your local response agencies – the fire department, police department, and animal control – and to your horse's veterinarian.

The most important thing you can do to help ensure the safety of your horses in a wildland fire is to be prepared.

Here are some simple animal evacuation procedures to consider:

- * Develop a plan in your area between horse owners and emergency personnel.
- * Set up evacuation routes and holding areas.
- * During the incident, stay off the phone!
- * Don't go to the evacuation area until you are told to do so.
- * Do you have enough fuel? A half tank should be considered empty.
- * Load the horses and let them sit. Follow exit orders from the fire department's coordinator.
- * Radio your route out and radio when you reach your destination. Everyone in your plan should have a family service radio, and at least some of you should be ham radio operators.

Practice this!

- * When you reach the evacuation area, face your trailer to the exit.
- * When you reach your destination, sit. Wear your helmet if and when you unload animals; use extreme caution.
- * If you are expecting emergency trailers at your property, secure your dogs with leashes and put them (and other small pets) in your car. Pack your car while you're waiting. No pet stays home!

Take with you:

Toolbox with wire fence cutters, crow bar, knife.

Several halters and ropes

Whip and stud chain

Towels to cover horses' eyes

Buckets, feed and water. Offer water if you're sitting over two hours.

Water for personal drinking and first aid needs.

First aid kit and horses' disaster kit, including ID sheets for each

Flashlights and batteries

Money

Phone numbers of your coordinator, friends and family, vets

Wear gloves, sturdy shoes, and take a coat, rainwear, goggles, N-95 masks. Do not wear synthetic clothing.

Since veterinarians often are called to the scene of an incident they need to know how to "play well with others". Veterinarians typically work alone, using the animal's owner as helper. On the scene of a rescue, your vet will need to know how she fits in. LAR has been designed to work within the Incident Command System (ICS), a tool used by response agencies that details the roles within each incident, a common language, and, if more than one agency responds, how the agencies will interact. LAR covers scene safety and management, how to use the equipment already available on most fire engines, and how to improvise.

There is a book written specifically for horse owners and emergency responders on this subject: *Save Your Horse! A Horse Owner's Guide to Large Animal Rescue*, by Michelle Staples. It is filled with pictures and drawings, and details step by step how to extricate your horse from almost any situation. It includes a chapter on safe trailering, and one on livestock rescue. This popular book also lists trainers and specialized equipment and tells you how to make your own equipment from supplies on hand.

There is plenty of good information on the internet about horses and fire. The Connecticut Horse Council has a Horse 911 program. Contact them at www.cthorsecouncil.org to receive their information packet.

The choice is yours. Learn the methods, carry the book in your vehicle when you trailer your horse, pass the word to other horse owners and vets, talk to your local responders – or – take your chances that the next incident is not yours and that if you ARE in a wreck you'll be one of the lucky few whose responders understand what to do for you and your horse.

Michelle Staples has been involved with Standardbred Rescue for many years. She teaches CPR, Pet First Aid, CERT, and Horse Awareness and Safety; and works within her community to promote disaster preparedness. She and her husband, live on the Northern California coast. Her book is available at the Large Animal Rescue website, www.saveyourhorse.com, and through the publisher, Red Jeans Ink, at www.redjeansink.com.