

Protecting Your Horse in an Emergency: Make Arrangements Now to Prevent Future Tragedies

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Almost weekly, we receive a frantic telephone call from a barn owner, caretaker or neighbor about a horse that is hurt or sick but no one can reach the horse's owner. Have you ever turned off your cell phone? Been out of reach by telephone? Gone on a vacation? Sure you have. Unfortunately, accidents and illnesses can strike at any time, usually when you least expect it.

Many horse owners are not prepared for a life-threatening emergency to happen to their animal. And if that incident happens when they are not available, then the real heartache begins – for everyone involved. As veterinarians, we want to do everything possible to help the horse but without permission from the owner, we cannot begin treatment. When seconds count and quick decisions need to be made immediately to save the life of your animal, make sure your veterinarian is aware of your wishes so he or she can start treatment while others are trying to reach you.

Whether you board your horse or you have people come to your house and take care of your horse, here are some important things to keep in mind:

- Most Veterinary clinics have a consent form that you can sign ahead of time stating what you would like to have done for your horse in an emergency. Be sure to make copies for your caretaker and post it on the barn bulletin board.
- At your veterinary clinic, fill out a method of payment in case of an emergency – including a limit for the amount to be applied without your consent. Most clinics require payment at the time of service so having this information on file works hand-in-hand with a consent form.
- The person who is taking care of your horse should be aware of who you would like them to call in case of an emergency, especially if you have a veterinary clinic that you prefer. Typically, this clinic has your horse's records and a treatment history with your animal.
- Keep your contact information updated with both your veterinarian and your caretaker. Include your mobile phone, work phone and phone for other people who would know your whereabouts.
- Before you leave town, make sure your caretaker is aware of your horse's normal feeding schedule as a change in diet can lead to colic. It can also be helpful to let them know of any behavior characteristics that are unique to your horse.
- An emergency is never a good time to try to frantically find a trailer or someone willing to haul your horse to a veterinary clinic. You can save precious time by having these arrangements made ahead of time.
- Bute (Phenylbutazone) and Banamine (Flunixin meglumine) are two common medications used by veterinarians in emergency situations, these drugs are often taken for granted by owners because they seem so commonly used, but they are not without their risks. Before giving either of these medications, you should **always** consult with your veterinarian.
- A basic equine first aid kit is a good thing to have wherever you keep your horse.

These are simple things you can do to help protect your horse and are all scenarios that we have encountered.

Accidents or sudden illness happen quickly and often without warning. In most emergencies, the response time can and does make a difference in the recovery and/or survival of your horse. Please take the time now to prepare for an emergency. You'll be glad you did.