

Barn Fire Prevention Check List

[The Horse 911: What's Your Emergency?](#)

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Michelle Staples, coordinator of the Large Animal Rescue newsletter and author of self-published “Save Your Horse – A Horse Owners Guide to Large Animal Rescue.” She had put together a Fire Safety Checklist for her website that people can use to ensure that their barn is as prepared as possible for this eventuality.

While editing the book for her I thought, I need to provide this to [TheHorse.com](#) readers immediately!” See the checklist at the bottom of this post and please share it with others in your community.

Barn-fire prevention requires a strategy like no other. You must be able to **detect** a fire with good quality smoke/flame/heat detectors; **alert** the response system; **surpress** the flame threat (usually via sprinklers); and of course have a **response** such as the fire department arrive. Sprinklers are something that the fire department strongly recommends.

[NFPA 150](#) is the Standard for Animal Housing Facilities (including horse barns) and is very specific about recommendations for sprinklers. Yet I know of very few barns that have them. Why don't horse barns have this crucial safety equipment as standard items? My opinion is that it is because veterinarians and fire department personnel are the very last experts to be consulted by horse people when they build a barn! They use the expertise and advice of their next door neighbor, the Internet, a \$10 barn building book at the local home improvement store, or engineer the entire thing themselves depending on the code enforcement in their jurisdiction.

Sprinklers are much cheaper to install, maintain and are far more reliable than in the past. There really is no excuse not to put them into new barn construction, and retrofits are becoming far more affordable.

Now, for the checklist. Review the following and see how many apply to your property.

Outside:

- My address is posted very clearly in reflective numbers at the road.
- I have contacted the fire department and they have given me minimum height and width requirements and turning radius for their vehicles.
- My driveway/road can accommodate my fire department's vehicles (no overhanging branches, gravel or other improved base, etc.).
- My fire department knows the location of all water sources on my property – ponds, wells, storage tanks, hydrants – and there is easy access to them.
- I have a standpipe installed in the pond on my property (if applicable).



Have "No Smoking" signs posted around the barn and make sure visitors are aware of the rules.

Photo: Photos.com

- My fire department knows the location of all emergency utility shutoffs.
- I have installed stall doors that open to the outside of every stall.
- If there is a lock on my gate I have a lock box and my emergency responders have access, and if there is a combination lock, they have the combination.
- There is a layout of the property in the lock box and the fire department also has a copy.
- I have cleared a fire barrier along my road, all fences, and along my driveway.
- I have cleared all debris and dead vegetation from around my stable.
- There are no overhanging trees at my stable.
- My parking area does not impinge on access or turning room for emergency vehicles--no one is allowed to park vehicles or trailers in front of the barn except for temporary loading and unloading.
- I have clearly marked and easily accessed water spigots on all sides of my stable, with attached hoses that will stretch the full length of the side of the barn.
- I have a shovel and a ladder on each side of my stable.
- I have posted "No Smoking" signs around my stable and have informed my boarders and visitors that smoking will not be tolerated around my property.

Inside:

- I have a sprinkler system inside my stable that was installed by a contractor and is prepared to handle the challenges of climate and water availability in my area.
- I have clearly marked utility shutoffs. My boarders know where they are and how to turn them off.

- I have marked and updated fire extinguishers at each exit, and if my stable is large I have one every 50 feet (minimum 10 pound extinguishers).
- Everyone at my stable knows how to use a fire extinguisher (and has shown me that they do).
- I have more than one doorway from the inside leading out of my stable and it is not locked when there are people inside.
- Access barn doors open to the full width of the aisles.
- I have all electrical wire encased in non-corrosive conduit.
- I have all light fixtures encased in safety cages.
- I do not use electrical extension cords anywhere in my barn.
- Cobwebs, hay, and debris are cleaned up on a daily and weekly schedule.
- All doors to stalls are in good working condition.
- I do not have any household extension cords, fans, or heaters in my stable.
- All equipment is designed for use in a stable, and if I am using household electrical appliances (microwaves, coffee makers, etc.) then I have paid an electrician to upgrade the electrical service to that part of the barn.
- I have a phone in my stable, and it is easily accessible, clearly marked, and emergency numbers and directions to the property are posted close by.
- Every horse has a halter and lead rope on his outward-facing door.
- Every horse and every boarder has practiced emergency evacuation procedures (horses have practiced with and without a blindfold), and every horse has been introduced to a firefighter in turnouts.
- Every boarder understands that once flames are seen in a fire, that *no one* will be allowed to enter the interior aisle of my barn, no matter how valuable the horses nor how “safe” it might appear to do so, and they understand that all horses must be extricated from the outside wall of my barn.
- I have designed my property to use a “run out” method of fire evacuation for the horses, where we can open the stall doors to the outside wall, chase the horses out into a laneway (without having to individually catch them), close the stall door, and all the horses run down the laneway to a safe holding area at least 100 feet from the barn.
- Every horse knows how to load into a trailer quickly and under any circumstance (veterinary emergency, wildfire evacuation, etc.).
- Hay and shavings are stored at least 50 feet away from my stable (not above the horses).
- All fuel, and vehicles that run on it, are at least 50 feet away from my stable.
- All aisles are clear of any hazards, including hay bales, tack boxes, electrical cords, and cleaning equipment such as rakes.
- There is easy and clear access to a secure space away from the barn where horses will be evacuated.
- I have lightning protection on top of my barn.
- I have used flame retardant paints, varnishes, and coatings on the wood in my barn.
- I have hired a contractor to install a detection, alarm, and suppression system in my barn so that I can go to work or to sleep and know that a fire will be detected in the very earliest stages of smoldering, not when the flames are leaping into the air.
- Barn evacuation and safety are discussed at every boarder’s meeting at my facility so that everyone is aware of the dangers.



Have plenty of working fire extinguishers available around the barn, and be sure that everyone knows how to work one.

Photo: Erica Larson/TheHorse.com News Editor

Please do a walkthrough with your fire department, hire a certified electrician to evaluate your facility, and call a contractor to install your smoke/flame detectors and hardwire them to your security system. Then call a contractor for a quote to install sprinklers, and send me photos and your comments when you complete the project and see the significant savings on your insurance premium for doing the right thing.