

Emergency Preparedness for Farm Animals

From barn fires to hazardous materials spills to natural disasters, emergency situations often call for special measures to shelter, care for or transport farm pets, livestock, and poultry.

Safeguard your animals, your property and your business by taking precautions now, no matter what the risks are in your area.

There are three steps to getting your farm and its animals prepared for major emergencies.

Step 1: Know the Risks

Knowing the risks specific to your area, community and region can help you better prepare. It is even more important to be aware of the risks in your area if you live on a farm with livestock and poultry, as those animals depend on you for their safety.

Some of the more common risks to farm animals in Alberta are:

- Overland flooding of creeks, rivers or canals
- Wildfire in forested areas or out of control grass fires in the prairies
- Spills or releases of dangerous goods, chemicals or hazardous materials

Step 2: Make an Emergency Plan

Your plan should help you respond to the risks that you feel are the most important and could cause damage to your property or injury to your animals.

When developing your plan, there are three main options to consider for how you can respond to emergency events: shelter-in-place, evacuate family and animals, and evacuate family but not the animals.

- A. **Shelter-in-place** – in this case you and your animals will remain on your property until the emergency passes or gets resolved.

If you remain on your property during an emergency, you will need to decide whether to confine the animals in an available shelter or leave them outdoors. Survey your property for the best location for animal sheltering. In case of flooding, ensure that your animals can be moved to high ground and have access to feed and clean water.

An outdoor sheltering location should:

- Avoid places that have overhead power lines or poles.
- Have no debris or sources of blowing debris.
- Have access to at least 3 days of food and clean water for your animals.
- Have adequate and safe fences that will maintain control of the animals.

B. **Evacuate family and animals** – with sufficient time and resources, you could evacuate your animals to a safe location where they can be cared for. An evacuation of more than a few animals requires a lot of planning and preparation.

- Arrange in advance for a place to shelter your animals. Plan ahead and work within your community to determine what safe shelters for farm animals exist, such as fairgrounds, other farms, racetracks and exhibition centres.
- Ensure that sufficient feed and medical supplies are available or can be delivered to the destination.
- Do not wait to evacuate, it can take a lot of time to move animals so you are better off going early instead of waiting until the evacuation is ordered, especially if you will be hauling a high profile trailer such as a horse trailer. It may not be possible to evacuate heavy loads safely in high winds. Also, once the emergency hits, roads may be restricted to emergency service vehicles and closed to regular traffic.
- Set up safe transportation. You will need to have access to trucks, trailers and other vehicles suitable for transporting each type of animal, along with experienced handlers and drivers. You may need access to a portable loading ramp to load or unload animals.
- If animals are evacuated to a centralized location such as a fairground for shelter and will co-mingle with other animals of unknown health status, try to:
 - Make sure your animals have sufficient identification (e.g. ear tags brands) to be able to tell them apart from others.
 - Minimize contact among animals from different premises.
 - Protect feed and water from contact with wild animals and birds.
 - Verify the health and vaccination status of animals which must be co-mingled.
 - Handle any mortality in a manner that minimizes the possible spread of contagious diseases.
 - Monitor the health and well-being of the animals on a daily basis, whether sheltered in place or evacuated. Seek appropriate veterinary medical advice and services on suspicion of an animal disease problem.
- Any special provisions (like continuing to milk cows while evacuated) will need to be considered as part of the plan.

C. **Evacuate family, but not animals** – There may be circumstances where the risk to life is great but there is not enough time to evacuate your animals (e.g. having a wildfire start in the immediate area).

- Protect yourself and your family first! Your first priority should be to ensure your family's safety so that you are able to come back to your farm and provide care for your animals after the event has passed.
- After ensuring the safety of yourself and your family, if it is safe to do so and time permits:
 - Open gates between pens and pastures to give the animals more room to escape the hazard.
 - Put extra feed and water out where the animals can get to it, as it may be a few days before you are allowed to return home.
 - Consider turning off power and natural gas to reduce the chance of these utilities causing additional problems when you are gone.

A key part of your plan will be to create a contact list of emergency telephone numbers that would include:

- Any employees or neighbours
- Your veterinarian or poison control number
- Local animal shelter(s), agriculture society or rodeo association
- Transportation resources
- Community emergency contacts, industry association contacts

You should include an out of town contact person who is unlikely to be affected by the same emergency. They can be a contact for family, friends and neighbours who are trying to contact you. Make sure all this information is written down, and that your contact person and everyone on your farm have a copy.

Now that you have your completed plan, do not forget to review, test and update your emergency plan, supplies, and information regularly.

Some additional thoughts to consider when making your plan:

- Make sure every animal has durable and visible identification and that you have proof of ownership for all animals. Keep copies of these documents in a safe location away from your farm or residence.
- Perform regular safety inspections on all utilities, buildings, and facilities on your farm.
- Identify alternate water and power sources. A generator with a safely stored supply of fuel may be essential, especially if you have milking equipment or other electrical equipment necessary for the well-being of your animals. Generators should be tested regularly to make sure that they will work when needed.
- Should there be a power outage, have a backup pump so that you can move water. Remember that community water supplies and on-farm wells may be contaminated during an emergency like overland flooding. Wells should be checked to see that they are secure from flood waters. It may be necessary to decontaminate wells after a flood.
- Secure or remove anything that could become blowing debris. Make a habit of securing trailers, propane tanks and other large objects. If you have feed troughs or other large

containers, fill them with water before any high wind event. This prevents them from blowing around and also provides an additional supply of water.

- If you use heat lamps or other electrical machinery, make sure the wiring is safe and that any heat source is clear of flammable debris.
- Remove old buried trash, a potential source of hazardous materials during flooding that may leech into crops, feed supplies, water sources, and pasture.
- Chemicals should be stored in secured areas, preferably on high ground and/or on shelving off the ground. These areas should be protected so that chemical spills will not result in any runoff or seepage.
- Label hazardous materials and store them safely. Be prepared to provide local fire, rescue and emergency management authorities with information about the location of any hazardous materials on your property.
- As an owner of livestock or poultry, you must obtain a Premises Identification (PID) Account and Number from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. PID was established to plan for, control, and prevent the spread of animal diseases. The PID system can be used to provide early warning to producers of a natural disasters such as a flood or fire which could affect animals under your care.

Step 3: Build a Farm Emergency Kit

In addition to your [personal emergency kit](#), make a farm emergency kit so you have emergency supplies in one location, and let everyone know where it is. Check and update contents regularly. Include the following items and personalize according to your needs:

- Current list or inventory of all animals, including their location, records of feeding, vaccinations, and tests.
- Supplies for temporary identification of your animals, such as plastic neckbands and permanent markers to label animals with your name, address, and telephone number.
- Handling equipment such as halters, cages, blankets, and appropriate tools for each kind of animal. Include bolt-cutters to quickly free animals in an emergency.
- Water, feed, and buckets. Tools and supplies needed for sanitation.
- Emergency equipment such as a cell phone, flashlights, portable radios (with weather radio band) and/or Weatheradio, and batteries. Know the weather radio broadcast frequencies, and local weather information telephone numbers.
- First-aid kits that are appropriate for people and animals.

Be Informed

- Download the [Alberta Emergency Alert](#) app to receive current information about disasters or emergencies impacting your community.
- For more information on emergency preparedness, visit [GetPrepared.ca](#).

- Visit Agriculture and Forestry Alberta for information on [Premises Identification](#) and how to apply.

For more information on hazards in Alberta, contact your municipality or community's Director of Emergency Management of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency at 780-422-9000 (Dial 310-0000 for toll-free access outside Edmonton) or visit www.aema.alberta.ca.