

Hi everyone! This is the AskAnnie podcast, horse girl reviews on products you use. This summer has been one for the books, but it really took a turn this past month as wildfires raged closer to homes here in northern Colorado. Fires have been burning here for a large amount of the summer, but in the past few weeks they started moving closer and closer to large populations, one of those areas being where I board Maddie. Having grown up in Alaska, I'm used to wildfire and the caution it brings, however, I have never evacuated horses because of it. A few weeks ago, the evacuation recommendations started inching closer and closer to the boarding facility, and my nerves got worse and worse. We made the decision to evacuate out of an abundance of caution and for my own sanity. Thankfully, the boarding facility stayed out of harm's way and we were able to return Maddie to her home just before a large dumping of snow suppressed the fires even more. While Maddie and I were extremely lucky in our experience, it really got me thinking about how to prepare ahead of time, if you can, for a wildfire evacuation. With the help of some of the other brands in the Equine Network, I've put together a list of tips and tools to have at the ready when a wildfire starts inching your direction.

First, if you're able, prepare your horse and your trailer ahead of time. One of the easiest ways help your horse have a calmer evacuation is to teach them how to load and be comfortable in and around the trailer. A stressful, high fear situation is not the time to be trying to force a horse in a trailer. If you have a trailer, try to pack up supplies ahead of time, that way you won't spend precious time running around trying to remember what your horse will need and can get out as quickly as you can. I knew a few friends that left their trailers hooked up prior to evacuating, again trying to cut down on the amount of time it took to leave if they had to in a hurry. Because this is a products podcast, of course I want to highlight what I made sure what in my trailer prior to evacuating. I had a decent amount of time to prepare, I probably overpacked, but I made sure Maddie was well prepared for a short stay away from home. I made sure to have the necessities including water buckets, a first aid kit, hay nets, a blanket, and feed. Luckily, Maddie's a pretty easier keeper, and we were able to move her to our friend's house, who had plenty of hay and pasture for her to be perfectly content on.

This is definitely another huge aspect of being prepared. We were fortunate to be able to go take Maddie to this location, but having a location in mind to evacuate to is really important. Many local fairgrounds in Colorado opened up their stalls to evacuees. Across the state horse owners also jumped on social media, offering places to stay, transportation and support for those needing help. Having a plan in place on where you're going to evacuate to will again save time and save some worry when the moment arises.

Overall, I am thankful our evacuation was relatively seamless and as low-stress as we could make it for Maddie. I had a few sleepless nights, but she didn't seem to have a care in the world, and just went on a mini vacation for a week. There were many people whose lives will be forever changed by this fire season, and I am incredibly thankful. My biggest takeaway from this experience is to be prepared, even if evacuation seems a long way off. I love this line from Horse&Rider's article, "Wildfire" written by Jennifer Forsberg Meyer with Dr. Barb Crabbe, that reads "If you follow the leave-early guidelines, there should be no need for advice like 'don't leave a nylon halter on your horse when you turn him loose' or 'write your phone number on

his hoof with a Sharpie.” I’ve linked it in the episode bio for your reference as well. Stay safe everyone.

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