

Protect your horses and property from the risk of barn fires

The Equine Risk Management Group offers fire safety tips for horse owners.

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Barn fires can strike nearly any horse facility, from small backyard stables to large, professional equestrian centers. The risk of a barn fire increases in winter when some facilities use space heaters, large stores of winter hay are kept indoors, and sub-freezing temperatures make controlling a blaze more difficult for firefighters.

Some of the most common causes of barn fires include problems with heating equipment, electrical problems, lightning strikes and arson. Other potential causes are careless smoking in the barn and spontaneous combustion of stored hay or straw that was improperly dried before baling. Some of these causes can be controlled by careful management, but accidents can happen at any facility. For this reason, farm owners are encouraged to have a fire safety plan in place in case the unthinkable occurs.

Equine Risk Management Group, LLC (ERMG) of Lexington, Ky. offers a free, downloadable checklist outlining fire safety measures that every horse owner and farm manager should know.

Among the fire safety suggestions offered by ERMG are: have an emergency list of nearby farms that can help evacuate horses; know your nearest fire departments and how to reliably reach them; communicate with your fire department and ask for their help in creating a fire safety plan and to avoid unnecessary risk factors at your farm; and have functional sprinklers, alarms and fire extinguishers in place.

While keeping horses outdoors at all times is one of the easiest solutions, it isn't always practical. The checklist also provides advice for preparing an escape plan in case of a fire, including how to practice an evacuation in order to be prepared should a fire ever occur.

To download the fire safety checklist, visit ERMG's website at www.horse-safety.com