

Barn Safety

Horse/Livestock Barns

- There should be no unnecessary trash or debris lying around inside or outside of buildings. It is unsightly, an attractant to rodents, can start or aid in the spread of a fire, and could cause an injury or fall to a person or animal.
- Any ornamental shrubbery around the exterior of the barn should not be poisonous to livestock. Check with your county agricultural agent for assistance in identifying plants poisonous to horses/livestock.
- No Smoking signs should be posted at all exterior doorways. Have sand buckets for cigarette butts available at the doors. No Smoking signs should also be posted in lounges, bathrooms and in several other conspicuous places around the barn.
- Correct size and type of fire extinguisher should be located at every exterior door, in the middle of long aisles and next to the main electrical panel box. Fire exits should be clearly marked.
- Every farm/stable should have an emergency first aid kit for both humans and horses/livestock. A phone with posted emergency numbers should be easily accessible.
- Ample Underwriters Laboratories (UL) approved lighting should be available for maximum visibility around the exterior of the building and throughout the interior. Wiring and switches should be encased in metal, weather proof boxes, and out of reach of stock.
- The building should have lightening rods and be properly grounded.
- Doorways and aisles should be free of obstructions and sharp projections, e.g., hardware.
- Ceilings need to have a height of 8-12 feet.. Door frames should be a minimum of 8 ft. high with a minimum width of 4 feet.
- Windows need to be inaccessible to horses and livestock, covered with bars or screening and made of safety glass.
- Stall and pen walls should be smooth, free of all projections, and of adequate size for the number of animals to be housed and to prevent casting. Stall doors should have secure latches.
- Water sources should be grounded to prevent accidental electrical shock.
- Feed tubs and water buckets should be smooth, clean and placed securely at the proper height so that the animals cannot become entangled.
- Flooring should be easy to keep clean and provide traction for animals, especially those with shoes. (Note: excessively rough flooring can cause abnormal wear, soreness and bruised feet especially in cattle). Any rotten floor boards should be replaced immediately.
- Crossties and other tying areas with safety release snaps should be provided to secure horses.
- Grooming and wash stalls should be in open areas; clean and well-drained to prevent wet and/or icy barn floors.
- Hay storage needs to be away from heat and electrical sources, and if at all possible in a separate building from where livestock and horses are housed.
- Stairs to haylofts should have hand rails and kept free of slippery substances and clutter. Railings should be installed around loft and ladder openings, and ladders should be firmly attached to the wall.
- Hay and bedding should be stacked so as not to fall on top of anyone.
- Low beams and pipes (under 7 ft. clearance), steps or uneven floors should be marked.
- Tack rooms need adequate racks and storage areas to keep equipment off the floor and out of the path of traffic.
- Storage areas should be large enough to keep shovels, pitchforks, wheel barrows, etc. safely away from animals. Items should be hung so that people cannot strike their heads on them. Hoses should be neatly hung in wash rack areas so that people and animals cannot become entangled in them.
- Grain storage systems should be rat proof, weather proof and not accessible to horses and livestock.
- Areas around vents and fans should be kept clear. Fans should be properly maintained and cleaned frequently.
- Garbage receptacles should be available for the deposit of refuse, bailing twine and wire.

Turnouts and Pastures

- Turnout paddocks and pasture fencing should be sturdy, 4-6 feet in height, and able to keep livestock in and unwanted "visitors" out. Any protrusion on which stock may become caught should be removed. Fencing material should be suitable for the type of livestock being housed. Loose wires and broken boards or rails should be attended to immediately.
- Gates should be a minimum of 4 feet wide, swing freely and have no sharp edges or corners.
- Footing should be free of ruts and stones and well-drained.
- Pastures/turnouts should be free of debris, foreign objects and toxic plants.
- Machinery and equipment should not be left in pastures and turnouts.
- Ponds, irrigation and open drainage ditches should be fenced.
- Fallen branches and tree stumps should be removed.
- Washouts should be fixed promptly.
- Any bridges should be strong enough to support horses and machinery.
- Periodic pasture checks should be made to ascertain that no poisonous plants are growing in or around the pasture area.

Roadways

- Roads and driveways should be wide, free of deep ruts and bumps.
- Low hanging tree branches and shrubs should be trimmed back.
- Gates should be wide enough for machinery and trucks, and set far enough back so vehicles are off the main road when stopping to open or close the gate.
- Overhead wires should be high enough for trucks, trailers, tractors, and other equipment to pass under.
- There should be 10 feet wide fire/emergency lanes around all buildings and structures.
- Vehicles should park in designated areas only to keep roadways open for emergency vehicles.
- Vehicle and trailer parking should not be permitted next to barn/stable.
- Vehicular traffic should proceed slowly and with caution.
- Speed limit signs of 15 mph or lower should be posted and enforced.

Arenas and Jump Courses

- Rings and courses should have ample, suitable footing; free from ruts, holes and unevenness.
- Fencing should be a minimum of 4 feet high and of adequate strength.
- All overhead and protruding branches should be cut back so as not to be a hazard.
- All accessory equipment (e.g., jumps, trail obstacles, barrels, poles) should be in good condition. Any broken or unstable items should be fixed or replaced immediately.
- Rings and jump courses should not attract attention from "outside" such as skateboarders, dirt bikers or all-terrain vehicle riders.
- Gates should be secured so as to deny entry to unauthorized users.

Surrounding Acreage

- Areas around the barns, rings and pastures should be free from debris.
- Ponds, large water storage tanks and waterways should be fenced and posted with "no swimming" and "no fishing" signs to deter trespassers.
- Hazardous passageways, hay drops, manure pits, etc. should be properly fenced and maintained safely.
- By following the above recommendations, the number of farm related accidents and injuries should greatly be reduced.



How safe is your barn? Do-it-yourself barn safety assessment

By Polly Haselton Barger

Take a walk through your barn with a critical eye for safety, and envision improvements that need to be made. Then make them!

Start with the feed storage area. Are all grains stored in a dry place that is totally inaccessible to rodents? If there are rodent droppings, they should be removed and the whole area disinfected (wear a mask if you are sweeping up droppings). Check for openings that mice, rats, raccoons or opossums can get through. Cover any such openings with hardware cloth to keep them out.

If mold is a problem in your barn, consider placing your feed containers up on a pallet so the air can circulate around them. Get in the habit of sweeping up spilled grain to eliminate attracting pests.

Make certain that your grain is stored behind an absolutely horse-proof latch and if other people have access to the area, consider a lock. Not everyone understands the importance of controlling your horse's intake! Be sure to post a detailed feed chart for each horse in case someone else needs to feed for you.

If you store hay in a loft make sure the ladder or stairs are in good repair. Check for nails that are sticking out and make sure all haystrung is contained. If small children have access to your loft, you might consider a railing of some kind. Check that the area is dry and well-ventilated, and no leaks have developed over the winter. If at all possible, store your hay and bedding in a separate structure if you overnight your horses in the barn.

Be sure to have functioning fire extinguishers in all structures and know how to use them!

Evaluate your horses' water source for various hazards. If you have a metal trough, check for sharp or rusty spots horses could cut themselves on, and if it is heated check all wiring for worn places.

"It's my experience that a horse will hurt himself if there is anything around to do it on."

Wherever you keep your equine medical supplies, be sure they are properly stored and locked up--totally inaccessible to neighbors, friends and children. If you give injections of any kind you should have a container for safe disposal of contaminated needles. A clearly marked plastic milk jug will do.

This is a good time to inventory your first aid and medical supplies. Be sure you have the very basics on hand: latex gloves, wound cleanser and antibacterial ointment, Epsom salts, etc. It is important to have bandages and leg wraps on hand. Disposable diapers and sanitary pads are incredibly useful as bandages. It is a good idea to have a thermometer and stethoscope and know how to use them.

All barns, whether large or small, need to post certain signs. Check with your attorney and insurance agent about what your specific responsibilities and liabilities might be. In many states, an Equine Liability law sign must be prominently posted. Certainly you should consider a prominent "No Smoking" sign, and a "Keep Out" sign.

Check your tack room next. Are there piles of junk and broken tack in the corners? Is the tack stored neatly and off of the damp floor? Don't compromise the integrity of your equipment by letting it hang crooked.

Are your blankets and pads filthy from the winter muds? This is a good time to do a complete tack check and thorough cleaning.

If your helmet is stored in your tack room, inspect it carefully now. Is it ASTM-SEI approved? Is there any evidence of damage (dents, scrapes or cracks)? Is the harness in good shape? Most helmet companies recommend replacing your helmet every five years, so check the date. Most companies will also inspect your helmet at no cost if it has sustained a blow.

If your barn has a hallway, be sure it is clear of obstacles. Could you lead a panicked horse through it in the dark during an emergency? Many people store stall cleaning equipment (pitch forks, rakes, wheelbarrows, etc.) in this

area, but all equipment should be well secured and out of reach of loose horses. If you have cross ties in your aisles be sure you never leave a horse in them unattended and also be sure that the quick release system is intact.

Next, check the stalls. Are they large enough for the amount of time your horses spend in them? Are they clean, dry and free of dust and cobwebs? Have your horses dug uneven places in them? Are there protruding nails or large wood splinters?

Are the latches secure and free of sharp places? Are the feeders and waterers clean and free of sharp protrusions? Are there any ropes or wires in which a horse could catch himself? Does the door open wide enough for the horse and person leading it to get in and out safely?

Most people who own horses have small containment pens or paddocks, as well as larger fields or pastures. One big safety issue is fencing. Safety in fencing is influenced by the density of the horses in the enclosure, as well as the materials used. For instance, in smaller pens with several horses an individual horse is more likely to be chased or knocked into the fence, so there is a great need for fencing that is safe and secure, such as rail or webbing. In a larger pasture horses are less likely to push each other into the fence, so it is more acceptable to use wire fencing.

[See your Southern States dealer](#) for supplies and equipment to get your barn safe and ready for spring.

Another issue in both pens and pastures is the presence of objects on which a horse could hurt himself. Did large branches or trees fall down during the winter? Did you tend to pile brush and debris in your horse area? Are there tractors or other equipment accessible to the horses?

Is your trailer parked where the horses can get to it? Once again, these are more of a problem in areas with high density of horses like small pens, but it is my experience that a horse will hurt himself if there is anything around to do it on. After all, he has no self-preservation instinct that defines an old truck as dangerous. Remember, an injured horse is potentially a dangerous horse, so consider fencing off all vehicles, trailers, tractors, etc., so your horse cannot hurt himself.

Speaking of horse trailers, be sure to include yours in your springtime safety check. Is the hitch in good shape? Pull up the mats--are the floors in good shape? Have the walls or partitions developed rusty spots? Are there sharp places on the edges? Does the quick-release mechanism on the trailer ties still work? Are there sharp edges where the horse steps on and off? Do the lights all work? Are the tires in good shape? Are the safety chains intact?

Spring is the time to initiate your fly control program. Horses that are aggravated by flies are not only at greater risk for disease, but also can be more difficult to handle.

With the advent of cell phones most people have emergency communication at their barns. Make sure you have updated emergency phone numbers posted prominently--including EMS, fire, vet, farrier and emergency contacts. Be sure to have clear directions to your barn posted with the numbers.

Have your human first aid kit clearly displayed and marked. If you trail ride you also want to have a saddlebag kit stocked and ready to pick up and go. Be sure it also includes a list of updated emergency phone numbers. This is a good time to check and restock these first aid kits.