

HORSE RESPIRATORY HEALTH DURING SMOKE EVENTS

OBSERVE. ASSESS. PROTECT.



1 BEFORE HANDLING HORSES

- ☐ Check the current Air Quality Index (AQI).
- ☐ Reduce or discontinue exercise when air quality is poor (see below)
- ☐ Keep horses in the cleanest, best-ventilated environment possible; turnout as necessary.

2 INITIAL SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- ☐ Increased breathing effort
- ☐ Flaring nostrils
- ☐ Persistent coughing
- ☐ Nasal discharge
- ☐ Lethargy or decreased interest in surroundings
- ☐ Reduced appetite



3 HANDS-ON ASSESSMENT EVALUATE:

- ☐ **Respiratory Rate** (Normal adult at rest: 8–16 breaths/minute)
- ☐ **Heart Rate** (Normal adult at rest: 28–44 beats/minute)
- ☐ **Rectal Temperature** (Normal: 99.0–101.5°F)
- ☐ **Gum Color** (Healthy: Pink and moist)
- ☐ **Abnormal breathing sounds** (wheezing, crackles, or increased respiratory noise)

WARNING SIGNS OF SMOKE SENSITIVITY — STOP EXERCISE AND MONITOR. NOTIFY BARN MANAGEMENT IMMEDIATELY.

-  Persistent coughing
-  Labored or rapid breathing at rest
-  Respiratory rate greater than 20 breaths/minute at rest
-  Fever (>101.5°F)
-  Blue, gray, or very pale gums
-  Swollen and irritated eyes, especially with discharge

4 EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS BY AQI

AQI RANGE		RECOMMENDATION
0–50 (GOOD)		Normal turnout and exercise.
51–100 (MODERATE)		Normal activity; monitor horses with respiratory conditions.
101–150 (UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS)		Light work only; avoid strenuous conditioning.
151–200 (UNHEALTHY)		No riding or conditioning. Turnout only if appropriate.
>200 (VERY UNHEALTHY/HAZARDOUS)		Keep horses at rest whenever possible and contact a veterinarian if respiratory signs develop.

DAILY MANAGEMENT DURING SMOKE EVENTS

-  Provide unlimited fresh, clean water.
-  Feed dust-free hay whenever possible (soak or steam hay if appropriate).
-  Minimize dust from sweeping, dragging arenas, or moving bedding.
-  Postpone strenuous exercise and unnecessary hauling.
-  Monitor each horse at least twice daily.

CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY IF:

-  Breathing is labored at rest.
-  Respiratory distress worsens.
-  The horse develops a fever.
-  Persistent coughing or heavy nasal discharge develops.
-  The horse refuses feed or water.
-  The horse appears distressed, weak, or collapses.
-  Eyes are swollen and/or have excessive discharge.



REMEMBER: Even healthy horses can develop airway irritation from wildfire smoke. Early recognition, reducing exercise, and communication with your veterinarian are the best ways to protect their respiratory health.

