

SEVERE WEATHER AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

by Brian Bennick

Have you ever thought "It won't happen to me?" Well, from personal experience I can tell you that severe weather of one kind or another will hit sooner or later, sometimes with little if any warning. The best you can hope for is to be prepared and to have some lead time to get out of the way of bad weather, because it's just a matter of time before Mother Nature puts a slam dunk on all of us! Depending upon where you live, your area might be prone to tornadoes, floods, show/ice storms, fires or hurricanes.

We live in eastern Texas and have our share of tornadoes, but last September our ranch became a living, breathing example of the uncertainty and fear (yes, we were scared) that hits when a hurricane strikes. Hurricane Rita came hurling toward east Texas with a vengeance. Reality set in as we realized she would hit our area. Were we prepared? Of course not! Like most, we didn't think it would happen to us, as though we thought some kind of invisible, protective barrier shielded us. It didn't and as the looming threat of Rita popped us on our foreheads we realized it was time to make many decisions quickly. So, we sprang into reaction mode and began to make do in a bad situation.

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We own 30 lambs and several pets. I quickly realized we were not as prepared as we should have been, so there were many questions and concerns to sort through and not much time to do it. One decision was

easy to make. We would evacuate. Other decisions were not as easy.

This whole process of figuring out what to do made me think of my Boy Scout training, "Be Prepared". Questions and possible answers began to flow through my head like a mountain flowing lava:

1. What do we need to carry for us and for our animals?
2. Can we take all of the animals? If not, which ones will we leave behind? (That was a very hard decision to make.)
3. Where will we go?
4. Do we have enough halters?
5. Is the trailer ready to go? My mental list went on and on.

I cannot stress enough EVERYONE who owns livestock must have an emergency plan in place before disaster hits. When it comes to bad weather, you have only a couple of choices: Get out of its way or stay put and ride it out. Also, you need a checklist of any and all necessary items that should be carried with you, should you decide to evacuate. Your 'get out of its way' plan should have evacuation routes charted for any foreseeable disaster/emergency.

Option 1: Evacuate (get out of the way of the storm).

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If you decide to go to a safer place rather than riding out the bad weather, then your checklist will be lengthy.

Example checklist:

Mandatory items:

- Halter for each animal.
- Lead rope for each animal.
- Current vaccinations on all animals.
- First aid kit (See article in the summer edition of Cool Camelids for detailed information).
- Feed, hay, hay bags, feed bowls and water buckets.
- Pet carriers and current vaccination records for dogs, cats and any other animals you intend to evacuate.
- Lama trailer that is ready to travel the distance required. Make sure there's air in the tires, you have a good spare tire, the lights work properly, you have a properly working jack, etc.
- Animal registration information
- First aid kit (human)
- Your personal medications
- Your important papers (deeds to property, insurance etc.)
- Rope
- Gloves
- Rain gear
- Coats for humans and animals
- Area maps
- Coolers
- Blankets
- Flashlights
- Batteries

Optional items:

- Portable pen (panels) you can attach to the trailer if needed
- Generator, fans, extension cords w/Ground Fault Current Interrupter (GFCI)
- Camping equipment: tent, cot, Coleman stove & lantern.

The items listed above are ones I found to be essential. You may or may not want to add to or subtract from my list.

Option 2: Stay put and ride it out. If for some reason you choose to stay put and ride out the bad weather, you should consider the items listed above along with whatever else you think you may need, as each situation is different.

Mandatory Items:

Note Items listed in "get out of the way of the storm" should be considered

- Fence repair materials (hammer, nails, staples, fence materials, etc.)
- Properly sized Generator (if you have a well, this is especially important)
- Gasoline/diesel fuel
- Water storage for animal and human consumption (if you do not have a well or generator for it)
- Food (animal & human)
- Chain saw
- Rope
- Tarp
- Wood
- Axe.

The items listed above are the things I now keep at the ranch to insure we can operate under the most adverse conditions. Mother Nature is unforgiving, so we must never take her for granted. Many in Louisiana and Mississippi lost their lives because they either could not or would not get out. So, please choose wisely.

We are so thankful to have made it out, carrying our core herd with us. Luck would have it some of our llama friends up north (P & E Ranch) had room at the inn and we were able to move to safety there. Fate must have been at our sides during this time because the traffic leaving the Houston area was grid locked.



Well, thanks to my knowledge of the back roads around our place I was able to make it to our final destination in four hours, which was record time for this event.

It was a comfortable stay and we were so very grateful to our friends. Thanks Ernie, Pat, Jessie & Kristen. After the storm we went into what I call "hindsight mode". We thought about all the things we could have done to better protect the animals we left behind if they got loose from our property during this or any natural disaster. My wife, Kim, had an idea that makes perfect sense and is so simple and cheap. She said, "We should make plastic tags with our ranch name, address and phone number so we can attach them to the animals' halters with zip ties. Then, if any of our animals get loose, anyone who finds them will know where they came from." Wow! That is so simple I think even I can do it!



A simple little plan may make the difference between being around and not being around to enjoy your precious family and four-legged critters. I hope you will consider what I have written and come up with an emergency plan that is tailor made to your area and possible emergency situations that may arise. Nothing is worse than being caught off guard smack in the middle of an impending disaster. On the other hand, if you have a plan, then you may be able to turn a potential disaster into nothing more than a memory of a tough situation that worked out better than you could have hoped.