



For immediate release:

Subject: Fire Safety & Prevention for Equine Facilities Seminar – Sept. 25, 2010

San Antonio Saddle Horse Association (SASHA) offered a Fire Prevention and Safety on Saturday September 25, 2010. Hosted by Michael and Megan Beasom at their beautiful Victory Lane Farm in Boerne, Texas, the seminar was conducted by the Boerne Fire Department's Lt. Lyle Mattick and Firefighter Gerard Silva. The seminar was offered at no cost by SASHA as a public service to both backyard horse enthusiasts and equine professionals alike.

In the back of the mind of every horse owner, stable or ranch owner - or anyone who lives in a rural area - is the fear of a barn fire buffered by the hope that they are prepared. The SASHA Board of Directors tackled the potential devastation with a pro-active move. "Inviting your local fire department out to your barn for a tour is the best thing you can do" says Sandra Arguello, SASHA President. "This visit gave the Firefighters a chance to familiarize themselves with the layout of the barn and surrounding buildings and paddocks and gain some familiarity with the everyday equipment that horse owners take for granted. Halters, lead ropes, stall door locks, and the way the horses will react to the trucks, sirens and equipment are experiences that are new from everyone's perspective.

Lt. Mattick and his team from Boerne, accompanied by Section Chief Brooke Hildreth and Engineer Paul Homan from the San Antonio Fire Department, arrived at Victory Lane Farm on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. The big red fire truck, becoming evermore impressive as it made its way up the long drive to the barn, raised an unexpected sense of awe and gratitude for those men and women who choose the path of selfless service. The Firefighters allowed a hands-on display to those who attended including state of the art night vision and thermal imaging cameras and equipment. Several scenarios were discussed concerning typical barn hazards. Exit strategies similar to those of a "bucket brigade" were played out and thought through giving the barn and horse owners, as well as the rescue personnel, a planned sense of direction in a worst case scenario.

Following the presentation was a question and answer session which included the reverse role of the Firefighters asking the equestrians questions about standard barn operations and typical horse behavior. More often than not the Firefighter is not familiar with horses. They are unaware that the breeds do not all have the same temperaments. They were surprised to learn that horses, animals of herd and habit, will return to a burning stall because it is what they are familiar with and have patterned in the logical "safe zone" of their minds. The horses must be secured in an outlying paddock after being rescued from the danger of the fire or they will surely return to it despite the danger. Lt. Mattick donned his firefighting gear which included a self contained breathing apparatus "think Darth Vader", several flashing lights, the reflective material in the suits that make them visible even through thick black smoke, and a siren-type alarm that goes off when the rescuer is inactive for a short period of time.

Several stalls were opened in order to gauge the potential reaction of the horses to this glowing, flashing, otherworldly foreign, awesome presence. The horses were on high alert and nervous. However, as was discussed during the "bucket brigade" conversation earlier in the day, this barn's plan used the most readily available and knowledgeable horseman, trainer Michael Beasom, to enter the stalls, reassure and halter the horses, and then hand them off to a groom, employee or horse owner that can guide them to the safety of an outdoor paddock. The Firefighters will be there, the horses will be acutely aware of them, but a plan such as this allows the Firefighters to tackle and contain the source of danger – the fire.

We are so grateful for the sacrifices these courageous and skilled men & women, and appreciate their time and attention. It was especially rewarding for those of us in attendance to know that we, in some measure, helped to better prepare those who risk their not only for humans, but for the animals that we love.

Important To Know:

Preparation of facilities and preparation of all personnel is critical. Know what to do to help the professional firefighter, first preserving our own safety. Often the firefighters are EMT-trained, at least as First Responders. The best practices will then help save our animals in the event the unthinkable occurs.

Listed below are a few important things we MUST know. The members of SASHA cannot stress strongly enough how important it is to have your own preparedness training. Whether your barn is large or small, residential or commercial, ask your local fire station to visit. Allow them to prepare a plan for their records and for your information. This will improve the safety of your facility and provide peace of mind knowing you are prepared, inasmuch as you can be, to survive a potential disaster. For those firefighters who may never have put on a horse's halter, a quiet practice opportunity may be offered. We suggest having a fire drill, so that all barn employees and readily available owners know what to do as well.

The following are some of the helpful hints - many of which apply to the home as well as to the barn:

Plan Ahead For an Emergency

1. Call the emergency number FIRST, using your closest, local department number if known, or 911. Have these numbers posted next to each phone in the barn and also have those numbers programmed into your cell phone.
2. Be specific when you provide your address so they can dispatch the closest emergency responders. Remember, when you call 911 from a cell phone you may be routed to a dispatch center that is located with your closest fire department.
3. Record your gate code with the Fire Department so they can get in without having to stop and force open the gate. Every Fire Department makes available a "Knox Key" at a cost of around \$200.00. This is a master box and key installed at your gate by a professional Locksmith. The fire department has a secure, Master key on each truck, enabling the most expedient access during an emergency.
4. Evaluate the driveway that responding trucks will have to navigate. Are there enough width, height and area to maneuver?
5. Have some system for knowing which patrons are at the barn. Secure their safety, as well as your own, before attempting to rescue any animals.

6. When loss of human life is not compromised, begin to remove the horses. Know ahead of time the nearest corral for the horses. Once the horses are in an outlying paddock be sure to latch the gate(s).

Around the Barn

7. Keep the barn aisles clean and clear of carts, tack and/or other items that would accelerate the fire or hinder the rescue attempt. Lightly moisten the aisle ways and arena footing to keep the dust down.
8. Electrical power will be shut off by the Fire Department when they arrive for safety reasons. All barns should have several strategically located flashlights available. The Fire Department will have a generator, a water supply and foam retardant on board the fire truck.
9. Keep grass mowed short around the barn and keep hay and dust at a minimum. A fire in closely mowed area can be all but extinguished by using a common broom dipped in a bucket of water and "swept" across the fire line. Long, dry and unkempt areas – especially during a dry South Texas Summer can be out of control and create its own firestorm very quickly.
10. Smoke detectors don't always work in a barn environment due to dust that can be interpreted as smoke by the device. You can install a heat detector in the barn and a remote receiver in your house that will trigger an alarm in the event a significant increase in temperature is detected.
11. Learn proper disposal or storage of combustible materials. Heat can and will build up to the point of a spontaneous combustion fire in piles of mulch, clippings and manure. If not taken off site, manure should be spread across a wide area to keep the naturally occurring heat and gasses given off by decay from combusting sub-surface and increasing to the point of combustion.
12. Be sure to pick up, clean and carefully store dirty, greasy and oily rags or other chemicals that are common around the barn. Linseed oil is very flammable, particularly if allowed to accumulate on rags and pile up in a mass. They can generate considerable heat and combust very easily.
13. Have enough large size fire extinguishers. Be sure everyone knows how to operate them. Keep one in each horse trailer. Remember this acronym - PASS

PULL – the pin to arm the extinguisher

AIM - the flow from the canister at the **BASE** of the fire

SQUEEZE - gently at first, then

SWEEP - the larger fire area

14. Conduct a practice fire drill with all stable employees and/or volunteers, grooms, owners and students so they are aware of what to do in the case of any emergency.
15. Hay, particularly oat hay, can generate heat if not properly dried after cutting. Spontaneous combustion fires in oat hay can be a common source for fire in a barn setting. Monitor bales of hay frequently to be sure it is cool and dry – between and in the middle of the stacked bales. The combustion will not start on the dry outer layers in a stack. Store all hay in a well ventilated area

Horses and Fire

16. Many barns will keep stall doors closed even if it isn't occupied by a horse. Develop an easy to understand sign/code for each stall so a fireman or other person rendering aid won't waste valuable time opening and searching dark empty stalls. Remember, there won't be any electricity and smoke from the fire could make visibility very difficult. Some barns have name plates or feeding instructions posted to the stall, but they can be outdated or misleading. Be sure to have a code that is easy to understand when time is critical.
17. Do your best to ensure that every stall has not only a halter but also a leadline nearby?
18. Even 15-30 seconds spent in a stall may mean the difference between life and death. If a horse refuses to come out of the stall or is panicked, leave it and move on to the next one.
19. Be sure to properly secure the paddock gates when transporting animals. The strong herding instinct, coupled with a loosely tethered gate can result in an animal running in a wild panic and in danger of injuring emergency workers and/or getting hit by responders' vehicles, or running back into the barn.

Away from the Barn

20. Keep a fire extinguisher in your trailer.
21. In the event of an unexpected roadside event, be sure to have flares and a bright flashlight in your trailer.

We hope you find this information helpful. SASHA urges all equestrian professionals and horse owners to get to know their local fire department. We hope you never need the services of your local emergency responders, but if you do, please be prepared and give yourself, and the animals you love, the best chance for survival.

For more information about this or other San Antonio Saddle Horse Association events, pictures, or information about hosting a similar event, visit www.sashatx.org.