

Make sure your yard doesn't go up in flames

What would you do if a stable fire started? Iain Skinner, of Acorus Rural Property Services, has some tips on how to reduce the risk

Stable fires can be devastating, and although the financial damage can be insured, the heartache can't. When designing a new stable block or reviewing your existing facilities, many factors should be considered, including use of the facilities, access, security, budget... and so the list goes on.

A horse's natural reaction to fire is to bolt, and if they can't escape from even a small fire, they'll often panic. The outcome can be serious, either from the fire or from injuries sustained while trying to escape. Preventing fire is a mix of design, management and common sense.

Sparking up

Sources of ignition are anything on or near the yard which will create heat, a flame or a spark. So ban smoking around the yard and ensure all vehicles are parked on hard-standing, away from the stables.

There are some less obvious ignition processes. Both manure heaps and fresh hay can burst into flames if they aren't managed properly, so both should be stored away from the stables and carefully managed to prevent fire breaking out. This is a good reason to muck out properly, as any dry bedding on a muck heap will speed up ignition from the composting manure.

The NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting) recommends that wiring is checked at least every 10 years, however, I've seen stables where the wiring is pre-war. Age, workmanship and design are all factors in electrical

Make sure everything is in place, should a fire occur



fires. Old cabling can be subject to attack by rodents, and the build up of dust in switches and junction boxes is very dangerous. Make sure that tack room lights and heaters are safe, and protected against rodents and water. For more information on wiring, go to www.niceic.com.

Arson is also a real threat to yards, and you should ensure that your yard is secure and, preferably, alarmed. These are the main sources of ignition to look out for, but there are many more, and you should inspect the site and neighbouring land for any risk.

Fuelling the fire

The second element that a fire needs is fuel. Unfortunately, the running of a yard requires a number of combustible materials; bedding, hay, feed and diesel will all fuel a fire, as will timber stables. Separate the materials from

your stable block and keep them safe from potential sources of ignition.

Feeling vulnerable

Any stable with a horse in is vulnerable, but also consider your tack room and office. If your stables are close to the house, this fire link needs to be broken, too. Smoke alarms should be fitted and linked back to the house.

Want to know more?

This has been a brief gallop through the subject but you can speak to your local fire authority and read 'Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Animal Premises and Stables', which can be found free on the internet following the link: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/animalpremisesfull>

Contact

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Plan of action

You've done everything you can to prevent a fire, and protect the horses and people on site, but you can never completely eradicate the risk. Think carefully about what you'd do, and make sure

everything is in place, should a fire occur.

- 1 Where can people gather safely?
- 1 Where can you safely turn the horses and ponies out?
- 1 Is there good mobile

telephone signal in the yard, and if not, where is the nearest land line?
1 Do you have the appropriate fire extinguishers on the yard, and have you had them checked recently?

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