

HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS FOR LIVESTOCK

Joe C. Paschal*

There is much livestock owners can do to prepare for hurricane season. Then, if a hurricane threatens, you will be ready.

Make sure your animals are current on all vaccinations (blackleg, leptospirosis, tetanus, encephalitis). Several days before a hurricane is expected to make landfall, purchase additional feed, hay and water supplies. These items might not be available after a hurricane. Also stock up on basic veterinary supplies (bandages, topical antibiotics, tetanus toxoid) and have restraint equipment (ropes, halters) ready for restraining injured animals that need veterinary assistance.

Prepare barns and pens by replacing loose boards or sheets of tin, or nailing them down. Remove wire, fence posts and other loose items from barns, pens and pastures to reduce the chance of injury to livestock. Most damage to buildings and animals comes from wind and flying objects.

Barns can be strapped down to ground ties (in the same way trailers are) to reduce wind damage. Equipment should be placed under cover if possible. Immediately before landfall, turn off all electrical power and water in the barn. Do not turn off the electricity to fences.

It is best to evacuate livestock well in advance of a storm. Make sure your trailer is safe for hauling and equipped with good floor mats, safe tires, a spare tire, and working lights. Take along your extra feed, hay, water and veterinary supplies. Don't plan to return until the storm has passed and it is safe to do so.

If large livestock cannot be evacuated, turn them loose in larger pastures or pens on high ground with some solid shelter or tall brush and large trees for cover. Livestock should never remain in a closed barn. If the barn is damaged by wind the animals could be injured or killed. Turning livestock loose is not as safe as evacuating them, but it is preferable to leaving them in small pens or barns.

Smaller animals (sheep, goats, swine, rabbits) can be brought indoors for protection if necessary. Use wooden pallets to build temporary pens in a garage.

Make sure feed and hay are well protected from wind and water. Move hay bales to high ground or stack them on posts or tires. Cover bales to prevent water damage.

Do not put yourself at risk by checking on livestock during a storm, but do check on them immediately after the storm. Most animals are used to being outside in bad weather and will simply need clean feed, a dry place to stand, and water to help them recover from stress. Electrolytes and vitamins may also help them return to normal. However, you should be prepared for the worst. If animals are injured, be ready to render first aid. Most owners can deal with minor injuries such as cuts. If animals are more severely injured call your veterinarian. Young animals are more susceptible to stress than older animals and may need more care. Also, bad weather often causes pregnant females near term to give birth, so watch for little ones.

With the right preparation you can protect your livestock from injury should a hurricane occur.

* Professor and Extension Livestock Specialist
 The Texas A&M University System