Make your time without power less hectic and less stressful by having what you need easily accessible.

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Barns Off the Grid

Plan ahead in case your power goes out.

By Katie Navarra

IT'S CHORE TIME and the power's out. It could be a few hours or a few days before power is restored. You have horses to feed, water troughs to fill and medication to administer. Boarders want to know when they'll be able to get in to see their horses and when they'll be able to use the amenities for which they pay.

When the power goes out, it's more than an inconvenience; it's a challenging time to be a stable manager. Depending on the season, the level of care provided to the horses on your property and the length of time the power is out, a barn that's involuntarily "off the grid" can be a difficult place to accomplish routine tasks.

Preparing a barn for a power outage is different than bracing for a significant natural disaster such as a tornado, hurricane or wildfire. Substantial weather events require strategic planning and often involve an escape route. While some of the strategies suggested below might also be of benefit during a severe weather event, this article in particular will address barns that experience power outages and power failures from forces of a lesser magnitude.

The Essentials

Each horse will drink as much as 18 to 24 gallons of water per day. Stables with access to natural, fresh water sources such as streams or ponds have the option of turning horses out for easy access to water.

However, barns without a natural water source must rely on either a well or a municipal water source, both of which bring complications during power outages.

"If you have a city water supply, consider having a backup supply so if the local

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Flooding can not only disrupt turnout arrangements and travel, it can cause power outages that can last for days or weeks. Be prepared for no power!

water co-op has power issues, you will have a supply of water for the horses in your care," advised Robert Coleman, PhD, an assistant professor of Equine Extension at the University of Kentucky Department of Animal Sciences.

An onsite water storage system can provide a backup supply in emergency situations. "If you have a storage container, consider a refilling schedule so that the water is not old or stagnant," he added. "The kind of container you use needs to be considered, as some that let light in will also contribute to the growth of algae in the water."

The number of horses on the property and the potential length of time you could be without water will determine the size and quantity of storage containers needed. Ask a local cooperative extension agent or your veterinarian for assistance selecting a storage system for your barn.

Light the Way

Losing power in the summer is less detrimental than over the winter months. Longer daylight hours provide ample time to complete daily chores. Buildings with exterior stall doors, windows, skylights and/or cupolas maximize natural daylight.

Despite the extra daylight offered in the summer months, tack rooms, stalls and offices without windows might be too dark for use. At a minimum, battery-operated flashlights and battery-powered fixtures can offer enough illumination to care for your horses inside the barn or outdoors in a paddock.

"Have at least a flashlight or two until things get sorted out," Coleman added.

For some barns, battery-operated lamps won't produce enough light. Determine which areas within the stable require lighting.

"Decide how important it is to keep the lights on," said Joe Martinolich, owner of J. Martinolich Architect, a firm that specializes in equine architecture and planning. "If you only need power in certain areas to care for foals or to store medications, you may be able to get by with a nominally sized generator," he suggested.

Work with a licensed electrician to determine the appropriate size and location for a generator on your property. Disclose all of the appliances that will be running on the generator so that the proper size wire is used during installation.

"When looking at a generator, make sure it has the capacity to run the electrical devices you are using it for," Coleman stressed. "Once you've purchased and had a generator installed, learn how to use it before it's needed."

Avoid relying on a single energy source. "Don't put all your eggs in one basket," Martinolich said.

Natural gas, propane, diesel and gasoline can all be used as an alternative to electricity. Access to natural gas may be limited in some parts of the country, but propane and diesel are readily available and can be stockpiled on site for use during power outages.

If an opportunity arises for you to reengineer the power lines on your property, consider running lines underground. Buried lines are a bit more costly to install, but they are less susceptible to storm damage.

"You can't control the entire system, so if the power goes out at the source, buried power lines won't help; but they are less susceptible to storms," he explained.

Communications

Before, during and after a power outage or storm, communication is essential. Clients will want to know that their horses are safe and when the facility will reopen. In emergency situations, communication with veterinarians or rescue personnel may be imperative.

Today, cell phones rather than landlines are the norm, and if fully charged, they allow for good communications. However, cell towers can be damaged by weather, and remember that you can't rely solely on your cell phone's contact list. Should the cell phone run out of charge, you won't

have access to that list of contacts.

Have a printed or hand-written list of phone numbers you'll need within arm's reach.

"When things are happening, it is not the time to start looking for a number," Coleman cautioned. "In addition to a list of numbers, make a list of who to call in an emergency."

Large barns may want to consider establishing a phone tree and asking clients to assist in spreading important messages among the group in a timely fashion.

Heat and Hot Water

Heat and hot water may be a luxury at some barns, while at other stables these amenities are necessary.

"While you might want it in the house, can you live without it in the barn? And if so, for how long?" Coleman asked. "In a breeding lab, the need for hot water is much greater, and a lack of hot water can certainly bring an AI program to a halt."

The need for heat is more dependent on the time of year and your geographic location.

"Keeping the parts of your operation that cannot freeze from freezing needs to be considered," Coleman added. "For example, the water sources would be a high priority."

Decide if heat and/or hot water are critical to your stable's operation. When sized appropriately, a generator can produce enough power to heat a room or a water heater.

Waiting It Out

Weathering the power outage or storm is as much about preparation as it is about surviving the conditions Mother Nature hurls your way.

In addition to securing the necessary provisions, survey your property for objects that can become projectiles in severe storms.

"Close windows, tie down things that can blow around or bring them in to minimize damage," Martinolich said.

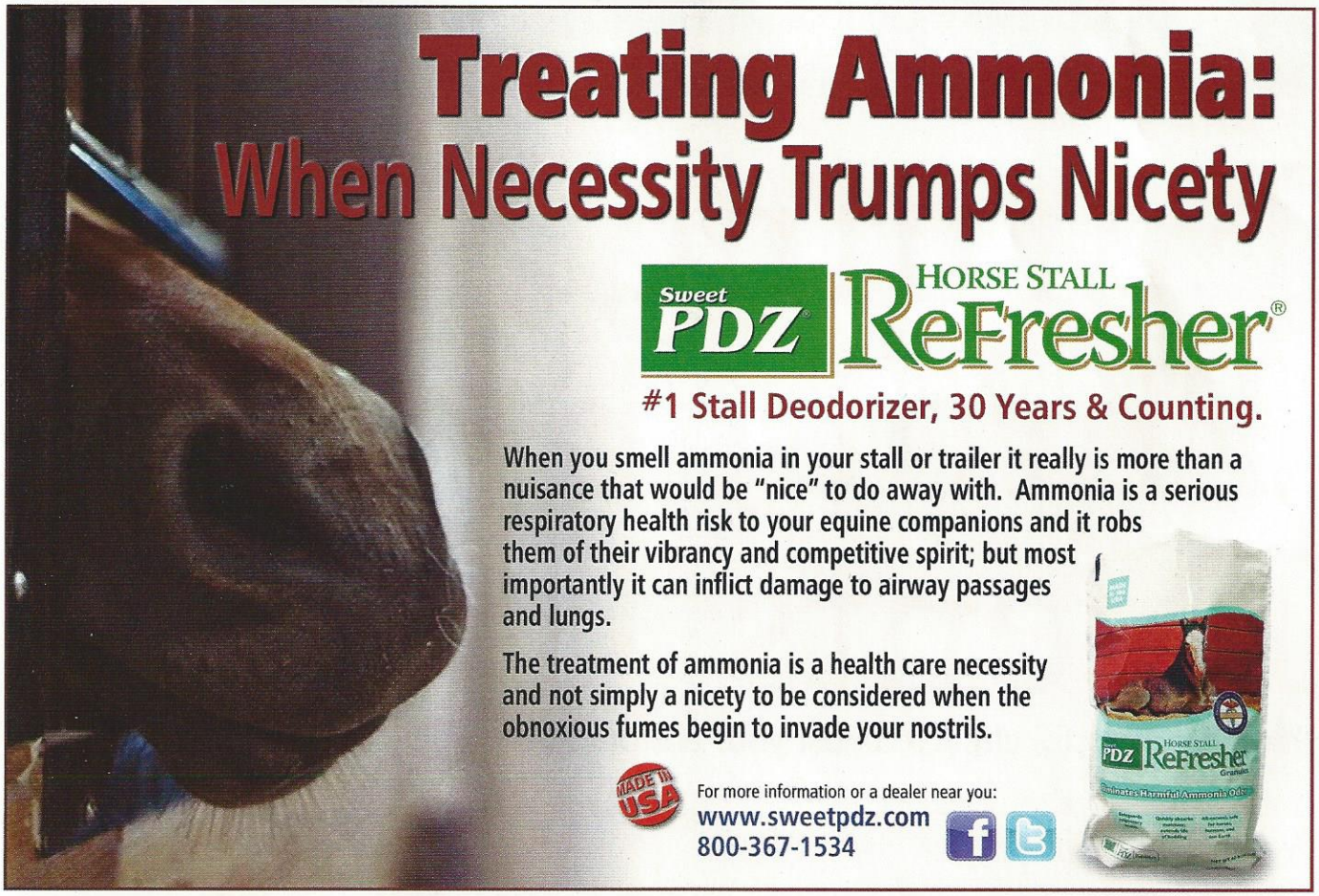
Maintaining a neat and organized stable minimizes storm hazards and provides a safer everyday environment for the horses and riders that use the facility.

Take-Home Message

Few of the strategies discussed can be implemented without planning.

"You can't do all of this on a moment's notice, so you have to plan ahead," Martinolich emphasized.

Prioritize what is truly needed to provide routine care and maintenance to the horses in your barn during a power outage. Develop a plan for dealing with specific situations and identify non-perishable supplies that can be stockpiled for later use.

Create a budget for upgrades that might be necessary on your farm if you live in an area prone to power outages. Outline a three- to five-year plan to space out expenses while steadily getting closer to self-sufficiency should the power fail.

Most importantly, in situations where advance notice of an impending storm or power outage is available, don't wait until the last minute to stockpile supplies. Make your time without power less hectic and less stressful by having what you need easily accessible. **SM**