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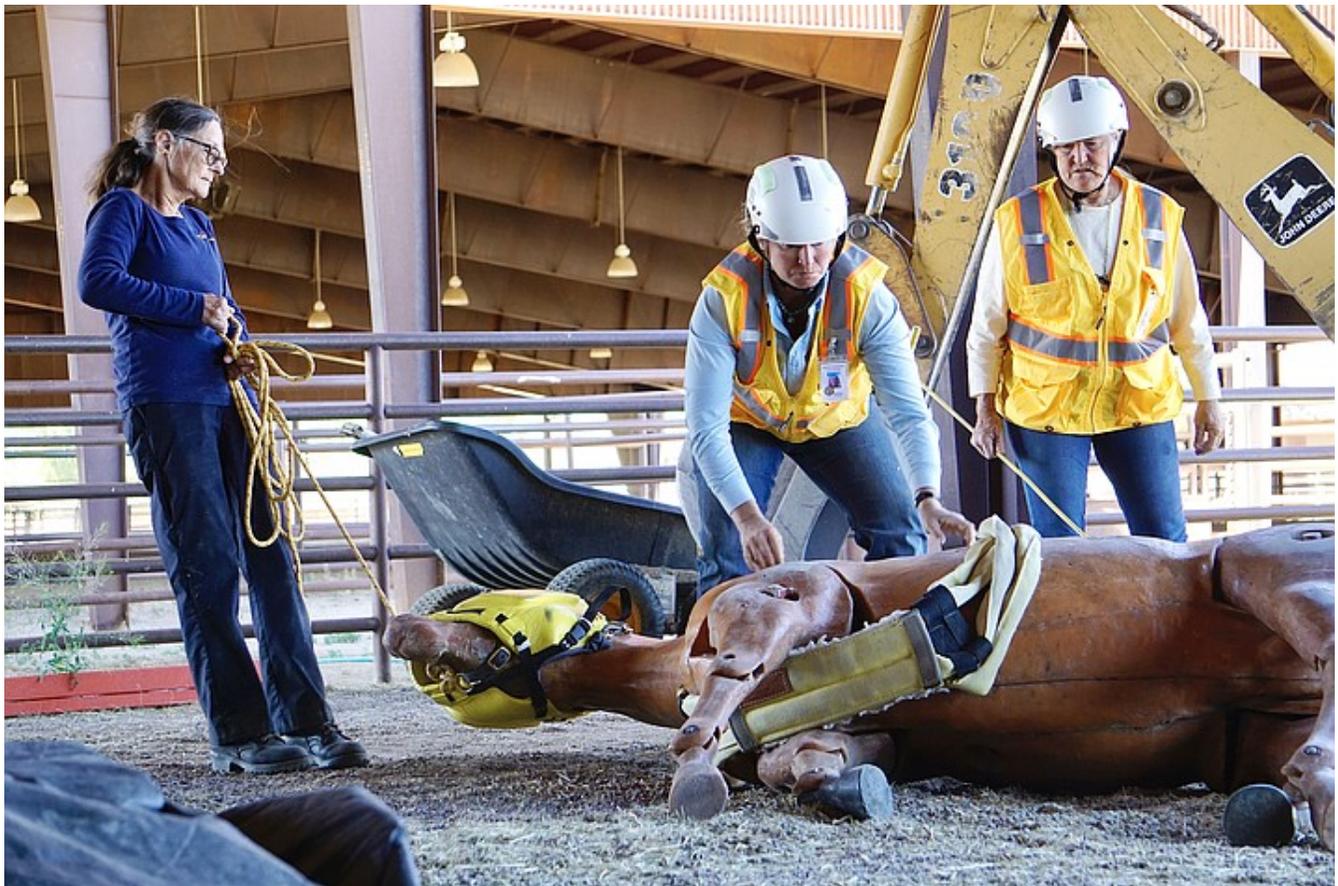
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Equine Emergency Evacuation fills gap in times of trouble

Informs public with demonstration event



Equine Emergency Evacuation volunteers tie straps around a horse mannequin during an emergency simulation on Sunday, May 24, 2021, at American Ranch in Williamson Valley. (Aaron Valdez/Courier)



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To say that the people of Yavapai County love their horses would be an understatement and some would even go as far as to say that it's a symbiotic relationship.

The importance of this relationship between owner and horse (or any other equine animal) is precisely why Equine Emergency Evacuation (EEE) of Yavapai County was founded, which has strived to grow its presence in the area for a while now.

EEE is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and is officially a Community Organization Active in Disasters (COAD), which is a FEMA designation. Its mission is "to ensure the best possible outcome for large animals affected by disaster."

You have large equine animals that are in distress or need to be evacuated? They're the ones to call.

In an effort to spread awareness, EEE held a demonstration event on Sunday, May 23, in which they presented introductory information about themselves and conducted emergency simulations at an equestrian facility in American Ranch in Williamson Valley. Equine owners from the area as well as first-responder agencies, such as the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office and Central Arizona Fire and Medical Authority, were in attendance at the demonstration.

"Every demonstration is a learning experience and I think that everybody here learned today, but everybody here is proud of what they could accomplish in the future," EEE founder Carol Fontana said after the demonstration. "We're always concerned about the fire season coming up but I think we are as prepared as we can be."

As Fontana alluded to, fire officials all over Arizona are forecasting that the state will see one of its worst fire seasons in history, thanks to low amounts of rainfall. Lo and behold, wildfires are the primary natural disaster that prompts evacuation measures for local ranchers and equine owners in Yavapai County.

During the first half of the demonstration on Sunday, Fontana and John Hughes, EEE cofounder, gave an introduction to EEE and gave a description on what exactly they do and how they execute it.

The second half of the demonstration featured evacuation demonstrations in which EEE volunteers performed the procedures of evacuating horses. This included unloading live horses from large trailers and placing them inside a corral at the facility.

There was also a demonstration performed by a tech rescue team from Maricopa County that showed how to lift up a horse that has fallen over on its side. A horse mannequin was used for the demonstration as volunteers wrapped heavy-duty straps around the torso of the mannequin while another tech rescue team volunteer operated a backhoe to pull it upright on its feet.



Equine Emergency Evacuation volunteers tie up horses in a corral during an evacuation simulation on Sunday, May 24, 2021, at American Ranch in Williamson Valley. (Aaron Valdez/Courier)

“It’s important to get out that there are things that can be done,” said John Fox, leader of the rescue tech team. “How many times have you put a horse down or a cow down because you couldn’t pick it up? It’s important for the people to know that there is somebody they can call and there is something that we can do.”

EEE does not have fixed sites for its operations but has over 25 designated staging areas around Yavapai County that can be used as a base of operations near, but not at, the site of the Incident Command for a particular wildfire, flood, etc. For smaller incidents, EEE operates on a virtual basis with dispatchers at home receiving calls on

the EEE Emergency Hotline and directing evacuation rigs directly to the locations where they are needed.

EEE also transports animals to various locations, including shelters, commercial stables and addresses that owners have pre-arranged with friends and relatives. These locations must be within the county and EEE will determine if the distance is reasonable. If not, the animal(s) can be temporarily held at the EEE Staging Area to be picked up.

FEELING AT EASE

Williamson Valley resident Dusty Spitler attended the demonstration and said she feels at ease knowing the area has an organization like EEE. Back in October, Spitler was fostering a horse named “Barbie” that fell inside a utility trench where she was trapped for hours.

Spitler tried contacting 911 for help to dislodge Barbie from the trench but because of a jurisdiction discrepancy, she was not able to get immediate help. After a while, a friend gave Spitler Fontana’s number and got a hold of her and within 30 minutes, EEE volunteers were on the scene to help dislodge Barbie from the trench.

Unfortunately, the help came too late and after the group managed to pull Barbie halfway out, Spitler thought it was best to just euthanize the 27.5-year-old mare because she was in such poor condition at that point.

Spitler said she was disappointed to have had to euthanize her beloved horse, but she also thought this incident helped shed light on a bigger issue: Which emergency service and/or agency was supposed to help them in this certain predicament?

Since this incident, EEE has worked with 911 dispatch centers and local emergency services/agencies to ensure they are referred to when incidents like this arise.

“This seems like a very good resource for Yavapai County,” said CAFMA Battalion Chief Phillip Cox, who was at the demonstration. “In the event of a fire or flood or just a horse down or stuck in a trailer, it’s a specialty thing and unique situation and EEE will be able to do that for us.”

Spitler was content to see and learn how EEE performs its operation at the event.

“If this would’ve been around when Barbie had her accident, she probably would still be here,” said Spitler, who still owns two horses. “We’re such a horse community up here,

so many animals are put down because they can't be lifted up and so this is just beyond heartwarming to see ... I'm just so impressed with EEE and how organized they are."

In addition to evacuations, EEE provides owner awareness programs as well as incident preparation and planning materials. For more information, visit eeeyc.org or contact info@eeeyc.org or Hughes at 908-723-4599. The emergency hotline is 833-922-9333. According to Fontana, EEE currently has over 80 volunteers and is always seeking more help and/or donations.

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