

Lessons Learned Sheltering-in-Place during “Nuns Fire”, Glen Ellen, CA

By Julie Atwood

Surviving without power, light, heat, running water, good communications for a day or 2 is not too challenging for an older couple with no kids.

But, after 48 hours, comfort becomes important. When you can't sleep, small things can make a huge difference.

Here are a few things that made life better for me:



- Taking time to network with people on the outside and letting them be personal messengers freed me up to help the community. We had no cell, Internet, sporadic emails, and nonstop calls and text messages from EVERYONE wanting to know if we're ok. Just communicating became exhausting. Relying on a few “trusted messengers” to convey information was vital to my conserving energy and cutting down on stress.
- Power and warmth from vehicles became our lifelines and sanctuaries. We have a fuel supply, but the little hand crank chargers we had in our Ready-Kits were handy to have scattered around to charge phones.
- I was very glad for my work boots with heat resist soles and thick wool socks.
- Setting up comfort areas for hygiene and rest became important, even though fire chased us from place to



place... kitchen, then tack room, then car. I eventually set up Comfort Stations in 3 locations.

- I grabbed every pair of sunglasses. Goggles were critical in the firestorm. Eye protection and gradient sunglasses were probably my most important gear.



- Warm, dry layers were lifesavers. Fleece was my nighttime friend along with a hoodie sweatshirt, and a pillow for resting in truck.
- Lots of LED lanterns and flashlights on stands made things easier.
- 1-gallon jugs of water everywhere functioned like faucets, made cleaning and hygiene easier.
- Really good hand cream mixed with a little Neosporin proved comforting after hours and days working water hoses.
- Herbal facial wipes and sprays made a huge difference: refreshing, soothing, smelled good: rose, lavender, eucalyptus, lemon verbena—things I had in my refrigerator. I mixed them with bottled water and kept it in barn. Made everything feel better.

Tips:

- Dusting of face powder over moisturizer-sunscreen reduces grime & ash sticking to your skin.
- Show Sheen works really well to keep sticky ash and soot from turning your hair into a helmet. And, it felt comforting to smell like a horse.
- Honey-Menthol cough drops really helped keep mouth moist and reduced coughing. Drinking water while sucking on one feels good.

- I grabbed all my go-bags, including my NVADG 48-hour kit. Then I stuffed a duffel with more jeans, towels, socks, tees. The car was our closet, and multiple bags were useful. Filthy, smoky clothes went into trash bags to wash post-fire.
- For Animals: removed fly masks while on the move, but put them on in the arena because of flying debris. We had to clean them frequently, though as they got clogged with ash and soot very fast. We used eyewash on several eyes and was diligent about wiping eyes, ears and noses.
- Baby wipes were added to the grooming supplies and were helpful.

New items I'll be adding to safety crates and go-kits:

- METAL emergency whistles. Plastic one I had on lanyard melted and was useless. I needed to use it several times!
- Kitchen strainers and skimmers are GREAT for cleaning debris from water troughs, birdbaths, etc.
- Bathtub and sink plugs in different sizes, needed for temporary plugging of holes in troughs.
- Good sporting-type sunhats with brims and neck protection.
- Lightweight fleece blankets.

Things I'll do better:

- Have more leather halters. Needed all at once.
- More hardware, chains and hooks to make gates for temporary pens.
- Have lots of extra hoses EVERYWHERE, stored in safe accessible locations. Many hoses burned the first night. We thought we had double what we'd ever need – but it wasn't enough. Ditto for nozzles!
- More equipment lubricants. Seems like we all ran out of 2-stroke motor oil...it was the equivalent of borrowing a cup of sugar...
- Set up a second "Safety Shed" near house. Ours is at the arena,

which worked great as a hub. But, downed trees blocking our roads, and fires burning everywhere, made transporting equipment difficult. Dividing the ranch into “divisions” will make things more efficient and safer.

BOTTOM LINE: My Ready-kits are of 2 types...

- 1) My NVADG deployment go-bag for Animal Evacuation Team
- 2) Earthquake, fire, or tree accident ready-kits

Everything was useful. There was NO TIME to do anything other than grab and go. Power (lights) went out almost immediately. Being READY FOR WHATEVER and knowing where everything was stored so I could grab in the dark (or without contact lens) was truly lifesaving.

LIFESAVERS:

- Current neighborhood phone trees
- Checklists, plans, reviewed frequently with staff and spouses
- Equines accustomed to being handled by various people
- Calm, focused, trained staff
- Having 1 person in command