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- Monday: Riding
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December 16, 2010

Where There's Smoke...

Smoke inhalation can cause unforeseen damage to a horse's lungs.

By *Becky Newell* in
[America's Horse](#)

"Starlight" was enjoying the good life in Southern California until wildfire swept through the county where she and her owner lived. With little warning, **fire** engulfed the landscape around the barn where Starlight and 12 other horses were housed.

Sprinklers and hoses were turned on to protect the barn from the encroaching **flames** as the horses were evacuated. Starlight was taken to Alamo Pintado, a 24-hour intensive care unit, where Dr. Phoebe Smith examined her about eight hours after the mare had been evacuated. In the initial physical exam, Dr. Smith found that Starlight was moderately **dehydrated**, had an elevated respiratory rate, an elevated heart rate, nasal discharge, a frequent cough and pronounced lethargy.

"It appeared that she was using all of her available energy for breathing," Dr. Smith says. "An **X-ray** of her lungs suggested that fluid had accumulated inside the lungs. We started giving her oxygen by securing a small tube inside her nose and attaching a length of oxygen tubing to her mane, and gave her steroids to help with the fluid in her lungs. We also put her on IV fluids to correct the dehydration. Starlight remained in critical care overnight, eating very little and continuing to take rapid, **shallow breaths**."



Evacuating your horses quickly is smart thinking during wildfires.

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Starlight's symptoms – rapid breathing, frequent coughing, nasal discharge – are all symptoms of smoke inhalation. The frequent wildfires in Southern California create unhealthy **air quality** for humans and animals alike. Starlight's case history from 2003 sheds some light on what horse owners can look for with regard to symptoms of smoke inhalation.

Smoke is a mixture of heated particles and gases, according to an article on **eMedicine**. Many factors – such as the substances being burned and the amount of oxygen available – can change the chemical makeup of smoke, but toxic chemicals such as sulfur dioxide, ammonia, hydrogen cyanide and hydrogen sulfide are commonly found in smoke.

By Day 2 of hospitalization, Starlight showed interest in **hay**, and her coughing decreased slightly.

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