

Trainers devastated by SA blaze (published www.harnessnews.com.au November 26, 2015)

By PAUL COURTS

SEVERAL harness racing properties have been affected by the devastating fires sweeping across South Australia.

Reports continue to flow in, with news of houses, stables and livestock being lost to the blaze.

Based in the hardest hit region of Mallala, astute trainer Phillip Westbury's property was ravaged by yesterday's fire, which has destroyed "everything".



Along with his home, Westbury's team of horses have also been claimed by the natural disaster.

"There is nothing left standing on the property," Westbury said as he fought back tears. "More than 30 years of our lives gone in a few minutes.

"Gear, carts, clothes, it is all replaceable, but when you lose a whole team of horses it is devastating...we love our animals.

"We are trying to save a few, and a couple look like they may be alright, but they will never race again, which doesn't matter, we just want to save them.

"We've had hundreds of calls and offers of support, which we are grateful of, but we just can't take any of that in now. We're heading back to the property in an hour, which will be hard to take."

Having also lost his home, well-known horseman Wayne Standish revealed he is lucky to be alive.

"I shouldn't be here right now," Standish said. "I saw a glow outside, so I went to have a look and it was the fire coming at me.

"It was only 60 to 70 metres away, so I grabbed the dog, jumped in the car, which already had the keys in it, and by the time I turned on the car and looked back, my house was burning!

"The house is just ash now, but thankfully the stable and horses are all okay. I'm meant to be racing on Saturday night, which I will still do as it will keep my mind off things."

Popular couple Claire Goble and Dennis Lyle have also copped the brunt of the blaze, which has damaged a large portion of their Clarendon Standardbreds establishment.

The fire claimed a house, sheds, gear and fencing, while leaving several horses badly burnt.

Although the pair were able to remove numerous horses before the property was under siege, the swiftness of the blaze prevented them from transferring all the animals.

In fact, while Goble was safely away on a transport run, Lyle was also caught in their home when the fire struck.

"We are lucky to be alive," Lyle declared. "We spent too much time trying to save horses and Claire barely got out.

"I didn't and was sitting in our house hoping it didn't catch on fire. I can't properly describe what it was like, but the flames were 12 to 15 feet high and came at an unbelievable speed.

"It was actually passing us by, then the wind changed direction and came straight at us. In a paddock down the road you can see where it got halfway through burning it and then changed direction."

To the couple's dismay, four mares are badly burnt, with some foals also baring scares from the ordeal.

"We have four mares in pretty bad condition and we are trying desperately to save them," Lyle said. "One foal is very young and his mum is so badly burnt she can't feed him, so we are worried about him.

"A few of the young ones have burns on them, but they should come through okay."



A view from Claire Goble and Dennis Lyle's property as fire approaches



JUST a small portion of the damage on Claire Goble and Dennis Lyle's property