This is an emergency, gentlemen

Vermilion Parish Police Jury takes action to bury horses that died of encephalitis.

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ABBEVILLE — The Vermilion Parish Police Jury took emergency action Friday to bury horses on private property to try to corral the spread of eastern equine encephalitis.

The jury called an emergency meeting after at least seven horses were reported down after suffering from the “blind staggerers” common to the mosquito-borne inflammatory brain disease.

Eight horses have been diagnosed in the parish since the disease killed 200 of 300 emus near Nunez before the Independence Day weekend. A miniature horse from a farm near the bird flock was sent alive to LSU for testing that confirmed the presence of the encephalitis virus, parish officials said.

Meanwhile, the seven dead horses are hosts for the disease and should be buried as soon as possible to prevent mosquitoes from feeding on the carcasses and possibly infecting other horses or people, officials said.

“We must have the permission of the owner and the tenant, if it’s leased property, before we can go on to private property and perform this work,” Moresti said.

The first of the burials was scheduled to take place late Friday and the rest today.

The state Department of Environmental Quality forbids the landfill disposal of diseased animals classified as infectious waste, solid waste supervisor Ricky Landry said.

He said state officials also will not allow the animals to be incinerated.

Public Works Director Hershel David said the state Center for Disease Control has been asked to assist the parish until the encephalitis outbreak is curbed.

State Epidemiologist Louise McFarland was slated to be in touch with the jury by Monday.

Jury President Donald Sagrera said the jury has a working agreement with drainage districts to use equipment and manpower to assist with the horse burials.

He said the parish also will seek permission from DEQ to incinerate animals if it becomes necessary.