Preparing Your Pets for Emergencies

If you are like millions of animal owners nationwide, your pet is an important member of your household. Unfortunately, animals are also affected by disaster.

The likelihood that you and your animals will survive an emergency such as a fire or flood, tornado or terrorist attack depends largely on emergency planning done today. Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as assembling an animal emergency supply kit and developing a pet care buddy system, are the same for any emergency. Whether you decide to stay put in an emergency or evacuate to a safer location, you will need to make plans in advance for your pets. Keep in mind that what’s best for you is typically what’s best for your animals.

If you evacuate your home, DO NOT LEAVE YOUR PETS BEHIND! Pets most likely cannot survive on their own, and if by some remote chance they do, you may not be able to find them when you return.

If you are going to a public shelter, it is important to understand that animals may not be allowed inside. Plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your pets; consider loved ones or friends outside of your immediate area who would be willing to host you and your pets in an emergency.

Make a back-up emergency plan in case you can’t care for your animals yourself. Develop a buddy system with neighbors, friends and relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so. Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to make it on your own for at least three days, maybe longer.

Guidelines for Pets

Plan for pet needs during a disaster by:

• Identifying shelter. For public health reasons, many emergency shelters cannot accept pets. Find out which motels and hotels in the area you plan to evacuate to allow pets (www.gopetfriendly.com is one resource for pet-friendly lodging) well in advance of needing them. There are also a number of guides that list hotels/motels that permit pets and could serve as a starting point. Include your local animal shelter’s number in your list of emergency numbers. They might be able to provide information concerning pets during a disaster.

• Take pet food, bottled water, medications, veterinary records, cat litter/pan, manual can opener, food dishes, first aid kit and other supplies with you in case they’re not available later. Before you find yourself in an emergency situation, consider packing a “pet survival” kit which could be easily deployed if disaster hits. Information on what should be in your pet disaster preparedness kit is provided later in this guide.

• Make sure identification tags are up-to-date and securely fastened to your pet’s collar. If possible, attach the address and/or phone number of your evacuation site. If your pet gets lost, his tag is his ticket home.

• Make sure you have a current photo of your pet for identification purposes.

• Make sure you have a secure pet carrier, leash or harness for your pet so that if he panics, he can’t escape.
Prepare Shelter for Your Pet

Take the following steps to prepare to shelter your pet:

- Call your local emergency management office, animal shelter or animal control office to get advice and information.
- If you are unable to return to your home right away, you may need to board your pet. Find out where pet boarding facilities are located. Be sure to research some outside your local area in case local facilities close.
- Most boarding kennels, veterinarians and animal shelters will need your pet’s medical records to make sure all vaccinations are current. Include copies in your “pet survival” kit along with a photo of your pet.
- Some animal shelters will provide temporary foster care for owned pets in times of disaster but this should be considered only as a last resort.
- If you have no alternative but to leave your pet at home, there are some precautions you must take, but remember that leaving your pet at home alone can place your animal in great danger! Confine your pet to a safe area inside—NEVER leave your pet chained outside! Leave them loose inside your home with food and plenty of water. Remove the toilet tank lid, raise the seat and brace the bathroom door open so they can drink. Place a notice outside in a visible area advising what pets are in the house and where they are located. Provide a phone number where you or a contact can be reached as well as the name and number of your vet.

Protect Your Pet During a Disaster

- Bring your pets inside immediately.
- Have newspapers on hand for sanitary purposes. Feed the animals moist or canned food so they will need less water to drink.

- Animals have instincts about severe weather changes and will often isolate themselves if they are afraid. Bringing them inside early can stop them from running away. Never leave a pet outside or tied up during a storm.
- Separate dogs and cats. Even if your dogs and cats normally get along, the anxiety of an emergency situation can cause pets to act irrationally. Keep small pets away from cats and dogs.
- In an emergency, you may have to take your birds with you. Talk with your veterinarian or local pet store about special food dispensers that regulate the amount of food a bird is given. Make sure that the bird is caged and the cage is covered by a thin cloth or sheet to provide security and filtered light.

Caring for Your Pet after a Disaster

- If after a disaster you have to leave town, take your pets with you. Pets are unlikely to survive on their own.
- In the first few days after the disaster, leash your pets when they go outside. Always maintain close contact. Familiar scents and landmarks may be altered and your pet may become confused and lost. Also, snakes and other dangerous animals may be brought into flood areas. Downed power lines are a hazard.
- The behavior of your pets may change after an emergency. Normally quiet and friendly pets may become aggressive or defensive. Watch animals closely. Leash dogs and place them in a fenced yard with access to shelter and water.

Prepare: Get a Pet Emergency Supply Kit

Just as you do with your family’s emergency supply kit, think first about the basics for survival, particularly food and water. Consider two kits. In one, put everything you and your pets will need to stay where you are. The other should be a lightweight, smaller version.
you can take with you if you and your pets have to get away. Plus, be sure to review your kits regularly to ensure that their contents, especially foods and medicines, are fresh.

- **Food**
  Keep at least three days of food in an air-tight, waterproof container.

- **Water**
  Store at least three days of water specifically for your pets in addition to water you need for yourself and your family.

- **Medicines and medical records**
  Keep an extra supply of medicines your pet takes on a regular basis in a waterproof container.

- **First aid kit**
  Talk to your veterinarian about what is most appropriate for your pet’s emergency medical needs. Most kits should include cotton bandage rolls, bandage tape and scissors; antibiotic ointment; flea and tick prevention; latex gloves, isopropyl alcohol and saline solution. Include a pet first aid reference book.

- **Collar with ID tag, harness or leash**
  Your pet should wear a collar with its rabies tag and identification at all times. Include a backup leash, collar and ID tag in your pet’s emergency supply kit. In addition, place copies of your pet’s registration information, adoption papers, vaccination documents and medical records in a clean plastic bag or waterproof container and also add them to your kit. You should also consider talking with your veterinarian about permanent identification such as microchipping, and enrolling your pet in a recovery database.

- **Crate or other pet carrier**
  If you need to evacuate in an emergency situation take your pets and animals with you provided that it is practical to do so. In many cases, your ability to do so will be aided by having a sturdy, safe, comfortable crate or carrier ready for transporting your pet. The carrier should be large enough for your pet to stand, turn around and lie down.

- **Sanitation**
  Include pet litter and litter box if appropriate, newspapers, paper towels, plastic trash bags and household chlorine bleach to provide for your pet’s sanitation needs. You can use bleach as a disinfectant (dilute nine parts water to one part bleach), or in an emergency you can also use it to purify water. Use 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented or color safe bleaches, or those with added cleaners.

- **A picture of you and your pet together**
  If you become separated from your pet during an emergency, a picture of you and your pet together will help you document ownership and allow others to assist you in identifying your pet. Include detailed information about species, breed, age, sex, color and distinguishing characteristics.

- **Familiar items**
  Put favorite toys, treats or bedding in your kit. Familiar items can help reduce stress for your pet.

**Plan: Know What You Will Do in an Emergency.**

Be prepared to assess the situation. Use whatever you have on hand to take care of yourself and ensure your pet’s safety during an emergency. Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the emergency the first important decision is whether you stay put or get away. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Use common sense and the information you are learning here to determine if there is immediate danger.

In any emergency, local authorities may or may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet for instructions. If you’re specifically told to evacuate, shelter-in-place or seek medical treatment, do so immediately.
• **Create a plan to get away**
  Plan how you will assemble your pets and anticipate where you will go. If you must evacuate, take your pets with you if practical. If you go to a public shelter, keep in mind your animals may not be allowed inside. Secure appropriate lodging in advance depending on the number and type of animals in your care. Consider family or friends willing to take in you and your pets in an emergency. Other options may include: a hotel or motel that takes pets or a boarding facility, such as a kennel or veterinary hospital that is near an evacuation facility or your family’s meeting place. Find out before an emergency happens if any of these facilities in your area might be viable options for you and your pets.

• **Develop a buddy system**
  Plan with neighbors, friends or relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so. Talk with your pet care buddy about your evacuation plans and show them where you keep your pet’s emergency supply kit. Also designate specific locations, one in your immediate neighborhood and another farther away, where you will meet in an emergency.

• **Talk to your pet’s veterinarian about emergency planning**
  Discuss the types of things that you should include in your pet’s emergency first aid kit. Get the names of vets or veterinary hospitals in other cities where you might need to seek temporary shelter. You should also consider talking with your veterinarian about permanent identification such as microchipping, and enrolling your pet in a recovery database. If your pet is microchipped, keeping your emergency contact information up to date and listed with a reliable recovery database is essential to your being reunited with your pet.

• **Gather contact information for emergency animal treatment**
  Make a list of contact information and addresses of area animal control agencies including the Humane Society or SPCA, and emergency veterinary hospitals. Keep one copy of these phone numbers with you and one in your pet’s emergency supply kit. Obtain “Pets Inside” stickers and place them on your doors or windows, including information on the number and types of pets in your home to alert firefighters and rescue workers. Consider putting a phone number on the sticker where you could be reached in an emergency. And, if time permits, remember to write the words “Evacuated with Pets” across the stickers, should you flee with your pets.

**Stay Informed: Know About Types of Emergencies.**
Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as assembling an emergency supply kit for yourself, your family and your pets, is the same regardless of the type of emergency. However, it’s important to stay informed about what might happen and know what types of emergencies are likely to affect your region as well as emergency plans that have been established by your state and local government. For more information about how to prepare, visit www.ready.gov or call 1-800-BE-READY.

Be prepared to adapt this information to your personal circumstances and make every effort to follow instructions received from authorities on the scene. With these simple preparations, you can be ready for the unexpected. Those who take the time to prepare themselves and their pets will likely encounter less difficulty, stress and worry. Take the time now to get yourself and your pet ready.

**Guidelines for Large Animals**
If you have large animals such as horses, cattle, sheep, goats or pigs on your property, be sure to prepare before a disaster.
• Ensure all animals have some form of identification.

• Evacuate animals whenever possible. Map out primary and secondary routes in advance.

• Make available vehicles and trailers needed for transporting and supporting each type of animal. Also make available experienced handlers and drivers. Note: It is best to allow animals a chance to become accustomed to vehicular travel so they are less frightened and easier to move.

• Ensure destinations have food, water, veterinary care and handling equipment.

• If evacuation is not possible, animal owners must decide whether to move large animals to shelter or turn them outside.

• When temperatures plunge below zero, owners of large animals and livestock producers need to give extra attention to their animals. Prevention is the key to dealing with hypothermia, frostbite and other cold weather injuries in livestock.

Cold Weather Guidelines for Large Animals
Making sure your livestock has the following to help prevent cold-weather problems:

• Shelter

• Plenty of dry bedding to insulate vulnerable udders, genitals and legs from the frozen ground and frigid winds

• Windbreaks to keep animals safe from frigid conditions

• Plenty of food and water

Take extra time to observe livestock, looking for early signs of disease and injury. Severe cold-weather injuries or death primarily occur in the very young or in animals that are already debilitated. Cases of weather-related sudden death in calves often result when cattle are suffering from undetected infection, particularly pneumonia. Sudden, unexplained livestock deaths and illnesses should be investigated quickly so that a cause can be identified and steps can be taken to protect the remaining animals.

Animals suffering from frostbite don’t exhibit pain. It may be up to two weeks before the injury becomes evident as the damaged tissue starts to slough away. At that point, the injury should be treated as an open wound and a veterinarian should be consulted.

Helpful Resources

Preparedness

Federal Emergency Management Association
Ready.gov
1-800-BE-READY

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)
424 E. 92nd St
New York, NY 10128-6804
212-876-7700 (Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET)
www.aspca.org

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was the first humane society to be established in North America and is, today, one of the largest in the world.

American Humane Association
National Headquarters: Washington, D.C.
1400 16th Street NW, Suite 360
Washington, DC 20036
800-227-4645
www.americanhumane.org

Since 1877 the historic American Humane Association has been at the forefront of every major advancement in protecting children, pets and farm animals from abuse and neglect.

The Palo Alto Humane Society (PAHS)
www.paloaltohumane.org/education/disaster.php

Animal Specific disaster planning information in English and Spanish.
Emergency Resources

After a disaster shelters are usually set up (in churches, schools, etc.) to provide food, shelter, first aid—and possibly counseling to those affected. To find the shelter nearest you, check your local newspaper, contact your local Red Cross chapter or emergency management service or call one the hotlines below. In addition, some of these organizations may be able to provide temporary housing or financial aid to those who have lost their homes.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
800-621-FEMA (800-621-3362)
www.fema.gov

Red Cross
800-REDCROSS (800-733-2767)
www.redcross.org

The Salvation Army
615 Slaters Lane
P.O. Box 269
Alexandria, VA 22313
703-684-5500
www.salvationarmyusa.org

Note—For those who would like to help, these organizations are always seeking volunteers and donations (food, clothing, baby formula and diapers—and financial aid). As needs vary by location and continually change in the days following natural disasters, it is best to call these agencies for a list of specific needs before you make a donation or to see how volunteers are needed.
This information was developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in consultation with: American Kennel Club, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, American Veterinary Medical Association, and The Humane Society of the U.S.