

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR PETS

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When a disaster inflicts its damage on citizens in our community, our pets are similarly affected. They depend on us for their safety and well-being. Being prepared can save their lives. Different disasters require different responses. But whether the disaster is a wildfire, a flood, or a hazardous spill, you may have to evacuate your home. Here's how you can be ready to protect your pets when disaster strikes.

### Be Prepared with a Disaster Plan

The best way to protect your family from the effects of a disaster is to have a disaster plan. *In the event of a disaster, if you must evacuate, the most important thing you can do to protect your pets is to **TAKE YOUR PET WITH YOU**.* Leaving pets behind, even if you try to create a safe place for them, is likely to result in their being injured, lost, or worse. Red Cross disaster shelters **cannot accept pets** because of states' health and safety regulations and other considerations. Service animals that assist people with disabilities are the **only** animals allowed in Red Cross shelters. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to find shelter for your animals in the midst of a disaster, so plan ahead. Do not wait until disaster strikes to do your research.

#### 1. Have a Safe Place to Take Your Pet

In planning for an emergency evacuation:

- Start a buddy system with someone in your neighborhood, so that they will check on your animals during a disaster in case you aren't home. Agree to do the same thing for them. (Note: After the terrorist attacks of 9-11, many New York City residents were scrambling to find ways to check on their animals that were left behind in their apartments that day.)
- If you live in an apartment, make sure your animals are on record with management and are able to evacuate via the stairwell. Dogs should be taught to go up and down stairs to better assist rescue personnel.
- Keep your pets' vaccinations current and documentation available.
- You may want to consider tattooing or microchipping your animals as a more permanent form of identification.
- Contact hotels and motels in a 30, 60, 90 mile radius outside your immediate area to check policies on accepting pets and restrictions on number, size, and species. Ask if "no pet" policies could be waived in an emergency. Keep a list of "pet friendly" places, including phone numbers, with other disaster information and supplies. If you have notice of an impending disaster, call ahead for reservations.
- Ask friends, relatives, or others outside the affected area whether they could shelter your animals. If you have more than one pet, they may be more comfortable if kept together, but be prepared to house them separately.
- Prepare a list of boarding facilities and veterinarians who could shelter animals in an emergency; include 24-hour phone numbers.

- Ask local animal shelters if they provide emergency shelter or foster care for pets in a disaster. Animal shelters may be overburdened caring for the animals they already have as well as those displaced by a disaster, so this should be your last resort.
- Know your pet's hiding places so you can easily find him/her during an emergency.
- Practice evacuation plans to familiarize your pet with the process and increase his/her comfort level.
- A stressed pet may behave differently than normal and his/her aggression level may increase. Use a muzzle to prevent bites. Also, panicked pets may try to flee.
- Include some toys for your animals in your supply kit. Animals that are confined for long periods of time can become bored and/or stressed.
- Be sure and comfort your animals during a disaster. They are frightened too, and having you near to give them a hug will help. It will probably do a lot to help you, too.
- Create a Go Bag and Pet First Aid Kit or your pet or service animal.
- Prepare a 24 hour Contact List.

## 2. Assemble a Portable Pet Disaster Supplies Kit/ Go Bag

- Whether you are away from home for a day or a week, you'll need essential supplies. Keep items in an accessible place and store them in sturdy containers that can be carried easily (duffle bags, covered trash containers, etc.). Alternatively, consider storing your kit in an ice cooler chest, which can be used for perishables and medications in the event the electricity is off and you are unable to use your refrigerator. If you need ice, you can usually get it from a Red Cross shelter.

Your pet disaster supplies kit/Go Bag should include:

- Medications and medical records (stored in a waterproof container). Always keep a backup supply of medications on hand, since a veterinary office may not be open for some time following a disaster.
- Information on feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems, and the name and number of your veterinarian in case you have to foster or board your pets.
- Proof of identification and ownership, including copies of registration information, adoption papers, proof of purchase, and microchip information.
- Current photos of your pets and you together in case your pets get lost.
- Physical description of your pet(s), including his/her species, breed, age, sex, color, distinguishing traits, and any other vital information about characteristics and behavior.
- Sturdy leashes, harnesses, and muzzles. Extra collars in case one breaks.
- Food (*dry and canned*) and potable water for at least 14 days for each animal.
- Bowls, cat litter/pan, and a manual can opener.
- Plastic bags, newspapers, containers, and cleaning supplies for dealing with your pet.
- Collapsible cage or carrier in which you transport your pet safely and to ensure that your pet cannot escape.
- Cotton sheet to place over the carrier to help keep your pet calm.
- Pet beds and toys, if easily transportable.
- Emergency contact list.

- Maps of local area and alternate evacuation routes (*in case of road closures*)
- Radio (*solar and battery operated*)
- Spoon (*for canned food*)

### 3. Assemble a Pet First Aid Kit

Consult your veterinarian when developing the first aid kit. The items below serve only as examples of what may be included in a small animal first aid kit.

- Activated charcoal (*liquid*)
- Anti-diarrheal liquid or tablets
- Antibiotic ointment (*for wounds*)
- Antibiotic eye ointment
- Bandage scissors
- Bandage tape
- Betadine® (*povidone-iodine*) or Nolvasan® (*chlorhexidine*), scrub and solution
- Cotton bandage rolls
- Cotton-tipped swabs
- Elastic bandage rolls
- Eye rinse (*sterile*)
- Flea and tick prevention and treatment
- Gauze pads and rolls
- Ice cream sticks (*which may be used as splints*)
- Isopropyl alcohol/alcohol prep pads
- Latex gloves or non-allergenic gloves
- Liquid dish detergent (*mild wound and body cleanser*)
- Measuring spoons
- Medications and preventatives (*such as heartworm prevention*), minimum 2-week supply, with clearly labeled instructions. Provide veterinary and pharmacy contact information for refills.
- Non-adherent bandage pads
- Saline solution (*for rinsing wounds*)
- Sterile lubricant (*water based*)
- Styptic powder (*clotting agent*)
- Syringe or eyedropper
- Thermometer (*digital*)
- Tourniquet
- Towel and washcloth
- Tweezers

### 4. Prepare a 24-Hour Contact List.

Prepare this list now before a disaster strikes. Include addresses and 24-hour contact numbers, if available. These contacts can be used by rescue personnel responding to a disaster affecting your animals or by you during a disaster or an evacuation. **Keep one copy near your telephone, one copy on your person, and one copy in your animal evacuation kit.**

- Numbers where you may be reached (*pager, cell phone, work phone*)
- Your prearranged evacuation site
- Local contact person in case of emergency when you are not available
- Out-of-state contact person
- Your veterinarian's name, clinic name, and phone numbers
- Alternate veterinarian (*30-90 miles away, provides boarding*)
- Boarding facility (*local*)
- Boarding facility (*30-90 miles away*)
- Hotels that allow pets (*90 mile radius*)
- Local Animal Control
- Local Police Department
- Local Fire Department
- Local Public Health Department
- Local animal shelter
- Local Red Cross chapter
- Local humane society
- Local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (*SPCA*)
- List of internet "lost and found" animal sites

## Know What to Do As a Disaster Approaches

- Often, warnings are issued hours, even days, in advance. At the first hint of disaster, act to protect your pet.
- Call ahead to confirm emergency shelter arrangements for you and your pets.
- Check to be sure your pet disaster supplies are ready to take at a moment's notice.
- Bring all pets into the house so that you won't have to search for them if you have to leave in a hurry.
- Make sure all dogs and cats are wearing collars and securely fastened up-to-date identification. Attach the phone number and address of your temporary shelter, if you know it, or of a friend or relative outside the disaster area. You can buy temporary tags or put adhesive tape on the back of your pet's ID tag, adding information with an indelible pen.

## In Case You're Not Home

An evacuation order may come, or a disaster may strike, when you're at work or out of the house. Preplace stickers on front and back house doors to notify neighbors, fire fighters, police, and other rescue personnel that animals are on your property and where to find your evacuation supplies.

- Make arrangements well in advance for a trusted neighbor to take your pets and meet you at a specified location. Be sure the person is comfortable with your pets and your pets are familiar with him/her, knows where your animals are likely to be, knows where your disaster supplies are kept and has a key to your home.

- Provide a list near your evacuation supplies of the number, type, and location of your animals, noting favorite hiding spots, in order to save precious rescue time.
- To facilitate a successful rescue, provide muzzles, handling gloves, catch nets and animal restraints where rescue personnel can find them. Keep in mind that animals may become unpredictable when frightened.
- In your evacuation kit, keep a pre-signed letter that releases your neighbor from responsibility if one of your animals becomes injured during the evacuation.
- You may also want to have a pre-signed veterinary medical treatment authorization with your evacuation kit – this will aid your veterinarian if your animal must be treated during your absence.

## What to Do if You're Ordered to Evacuate

Planning and preparation will enable you to evacuate with your pets quickly and safely. But bear in mind that animals react differently under stress. Outside your home and in the car, keep dogs securely leashed. Transport cats in carriers. Don't leave animals unattended anywhere they can run off. The most trustworthy pets may panic, hide, try to escape, or even bite or scratch. And, when you return home, give your pets time to settle back into their routines. Consult your veterinarian if any behavior problems persist.

Evacuate your family, including your animals, as early as possible. By leaving early, you will decrease the chance of becoming victims of the disaster.

- Bring your dogs, cats, and other small animals indoors.
- Make sure all animals have some form of identification securely fastened to them (*or their cage, in the case of smaller, caged pets*). The utilization of permanent identification such as microchipping and or tattooing is encouraged.
- Place all small pets, including cats and small dogs, inside individual transportable carriers. When stressed, animals that normally get along may become aggressive towards each other.
- Secure leashes on all large dogs.
- Load your larger animal cages/carriers into your vehicle. These will serve as temporary housing for your animals if needed.
- Load the Pet Go Kit and Pet First Aid Kit and supplies into your vehicle.
- Call your prearranged animal evacuation site to confirm availability of space.

## Caring for Other Animals in an Emergency

Identification, medical records, and proof of ownership are equally as important for other kinds of pets as for the aforementioned animals. Transportation of these species may require additional attention and care in order to decrease chances of stress-induced illness and death. It is important to keep pets from different sources as separate as possible and maintain the best possible hygiene in order to decrease disease transmission.

## 1. Birds.

- Birds should be transported in a secure travel cage or carrier.
- In cold weather, wrap a blanket over the carrier and warm up the car before placing birds inside. Also include a hot water bottle for warming your bird(s). During warm weather, carry a plant mister to mist the birds' feathers periodically.
- Do not put water inside the carrier during transport.
- Provide a few slices of fresh fruits and vegetables with high water content.
- Have a photo for identification and leg bands.
- If the carrier does not have a perch, line it with paper towels and change them frequently.
- Try to keep the carrier in a quiet area. Do not let the birds out of the cage or carrier.
- If your bird appears ill, be sure to lower the cage perch, food dish, and water bowl and consult a veterinarian as soon as possible.

## 2. Reptiles

- Snakes can be transported in a pillowcase but they must be transferred to more secure housing when they reach the evacuation site.
- If possible, promote defecation before transporting the animal (*for example, allow tortoises, lizards, or snakes to soak in a shallow water bath before bagging or caging*).
- If your snakes require frequent feedings, carry food with you.
- Take a water bowl large enough for soaking as well as a heating pad.
- When transporting house lizards, follow the same directions as for birds.
- Take a spray bottle for misting, a heating pad, a battery-operated heating source or other appropriate source, extra bags or newspapers.

## 3. Pocket Pets

- Small mammals (hamsters, gerbils, rats, mice, etc.) should be transported in secure carriers suitable for maintaining the animals while sheltered.
- Take exercise equipment, extra bedding materials, food bowls, and water bottles.

## 4. Amphibians

- Transportation of amphibians can be accomplished by using watertight plastic bags, such as the ones used for pet fish transport, or plastic containers, such as plastic shoeboxes or plastic food containers with snap-on lids. It is best to place only one species or if possible only one animal per container.
- Small ventilation holes should be placed in the upper wall or plastic lid. Smooth the inner surface of the holes with a file or sandpaper to prevent injury to the animal.
- For *terrestrial or semi aquatic* amphibians use a tiny amount of water, or moistened paper towels, clean foam rubber, or moss as a suitable substrate. For *aquatic* species, fill the plastic bag one third full of water, then inflate the bag with fresh air and close with a knot or rubber band.
- It is best to use clean water from the animal's enclosure to minimize physiologic stress.

- Care must be taken to monitor water and air temperature, humidity, lighting, and nutrition during the time that the animal will be in the evacuation facility.
- Housing at the evacuation facility should be consistent with that required by the amphibian.
- The enclosure should, if possible, be placed in a controlled environment, away from areas of heavy traffic, loud noises, and vibrations.
- Make sure that the container housing the amphibian is escape proof. Nonetheless, plan for escapes.
- Take an extra container of water, clean moist paper towels or clean moss as is appropriate in case any of your pet's containers break or leak.

## **If You Must Leave Animals Behind**

- Post a highly visible sign (either on a window or a door) letting rescue workers know the breed and amount of animals which remain. Free Rescue Alert stickers can be ordered from the ASPCA.
- Leave plenty of food and water in an adequate container that cannot be tipped over. Place extra food close to the animals so rescue workers may feed them daily.
- Do not tie the animals or leave them confined in an area that may be easily destroyed. Remember to make sure that all doors and windows are secure so your pet cannot escape. Loose animals on roads or highways can be easily injured and interfere with emergency rescue vehicles.

## **If You Don't Evacuate, Shelter in Place**

If your family and pets must wait out a storm or other disaster at home, identify a safe area of your home where you can all stay together. Be sure to close your windows and doors, stay inside, and follow the instructions from your local emergency management office.

- Bring your pets indoors as soon as local authorities say there is an imminent problem. Keep pets under your direct control. Keep dogs on leashes and cats in carriers, and make sure they are wearing identification.
- If you have a room you can designate as a "safe room," put your emergency supplies in that room in advance, including your pet's crate and supplies. Have any medications and a supply of pet food and water inside watertight containers, along with your other emergency supplies. If there is an open fireplace, vent, pet door, or similar opening in the house, close it off with plastic sheeting and strong tape.
- Listen to the radio periodically, and don't come out until you know it's safe.

## **If Your Animal Becomes Lost**

When safe to do so, immediately call or visit the nearest animal shelter or emergency command post. When deemed safe, return to your neighborhood to post and distribute lost animal posters, which include your name, address, phone number and a picture of the animal. Animals may stay hidden for weeks, so be patient and continue searching your area.

## If You Find a Lost Animal

If you should find a lost animal, please notify the local animal shelter as soon as possible and be prepared to give a full description of the animal (i.e. color, breed, sex), where it was found and its present location. Remember that sick and/or injured animals can become unpredictable from the stress of injury, and should be handled by a professional familiar with proper handling techniques.

## After the Disaster

- Survey the area inside and outside your home to identify sharp objects, dangerous materials, dangerous wildlife, contaminated water, downed power lines, or other hazards.
- Examine your animals closely, and contact your veterinarian immediately if you observe injuries or signs of illness.
- Familiar scents and landmarks may have changed, and this can confuse your animals.
- Release cats, dogs, and other small animals indoors only. They could encounter dangerous wildlife and debris if they are allowed outside unsupervised and unrestrained. Familiar landmarks and smells might be gone, and your pet will probably be disoriented. Pets can easily get lost in such situations.
- Release birds and reptiles only if necessary and only when they are calm and in an enclosed room.
- Reintroduce food in small servings, gradually working up to full portions if animals have been without food for a prolonged period of time.
- Allow uninterrupted rest/sleep for all animals to recover from the trauma and stress.
- Be patient with your pets after a disaster. Try to get them back into their normal routines as soon as possible, and be ready for behavioral problems that may result from the stress of the situation. If behavioral problems persist, or if your pet seems to be having any health problems, talk to your veterinarian.
- If your animals are lost, physically check animal control and animal shelters **daily** for lost animals.
- Post waterproof lost animal notices and notify local law enforcement, animal care and control officials, veterinarians, and your neighbors of any lost animals (*utilize online resources for lost and found animals*).

## What Can You Do to Help?

- Help organize a neighborhood rescue group.
- Take a Pet First Aid class with the American Red Cross. Their contact information is [www.seattleredcross.org](http://www.seattleredcross.org) or 206-323-2345.
- To be better prepared for possible emergencies or disasters, sign up with the Regional Public Information Network (RPIN) to receive news alerts on your computer on weather, street and highway closures, updates on what agencies are doing to respond to emergencies and incidents, etc., in King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties. RPIN's website is [www.rpin.org](http://www.rpin.org).



- Become a Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) trainer and train your neighbors how to prepare for and respond to a disaster, as a community. For on-line information, go to <http://emd.wa.gov/myn/index.shtml> or contact Tim Perciful, Training Director for King County Fire District #44's Mountain View Fire and Rescue on [tperciful@kcf44.org](mailto:tperciful@kcf44.org) or on 253-735-0284.
- Become a CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) member and train to respond to emergencies and disasters when called upon to supplement the efforts of fire department personnel and other first responders. Classes are offered twice yearly by Maple Valley Fire & Life Safety with the next class being held in February, 2008. For more information, contact the Public Education Specialist, Janine Johnson, on [janinej@maplevalleyfire.org](mailto:janinej@maplevalleyfire.org) or on 425-433-2116.
- Volunteer at your local animal shelter so that they will have sufficient help to assist them handling the overflow of lost or abandoned animals found during or after the emergency. Regular training sessions for helping out at the Kent or Crossroads shelters are scheduled by the Volunteer Coordinator for King County Animal Services and Programs. Her contact information is [lconner13@yahoo.com](mailto:lconner13@yahoo.com). More information on volunteer opportunities can be obtained from [www.metrokc.gov/animals](http://www.metrokc.gov/animals) or 206-296-7387.
- Join an animal rescue team and learn techniques to aid, evacuate and shelter animals during a disaster. The Washington State Animal Response Team is one example of a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides this training. For more information, go to [www.washingtonsart.org](http://www.washingtonsart.org).

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