

ANIMALS IN DISASTER

The following information is taken from a FEMA home study course that outlines measures you can take for the care of pets in disasters.

OVERVIEW

The following gives advice for pet owners and caregivers. It reviews the four phases of emergency management and gives specific recommendation for mitigating, preparing for, responding to and recovering from all types of disasters. Special emphasis is given to your emergency plan and disaster kit.

THE CARE OF PETS IN DISASTERS

Although we all like to think, “It will never happen to me,” disasters can strike anyone at any time. We typically think of disasters as cataclysmic events such as floods, hurricanes or earthquakes. However, individual family disasters such as household fires, violent thunderstorms; flooding, tornadoes and forest fires are much more common. Each year many people are affected by disasters. Many of these people own animals and must provide care for these animals and themselves.

DISASTERS CAN STRIKE QUICKLY AND UNANNOUNCED

Often you cannot prevent a disaster from occurring but you can reduce the impact of a disaster. A little planning goes a long way toward reducing injuries, death and suffering. This applies to your pets and yourself. You and your pets will need shelter, water and food. You are ultimately responsible for the survival and well being of your pet. You should have an emergency response plan and readily accessible kits with provisions for family members and pets.

MITIGATION

The best way to mitigate disasters for your pets is to avoid the disaster in the first place. Mitigation measures will help reduce the impact of or avoid disaster for your pets.

To Prevent losing your pet in a disaster

With unfamiliar sounds, smells and sights that follow a disaster, pets can easily become confused and get lost. Dogs and cats should have appropriate identification. Examples of appropriate identification include: tags with your name, address and phone number. You should also include the phone number of a friend or relative from out of state. More permanent methods include microchips, freeze markings and tattoos. Example of appropriate identification for birds include: leg bands, microchips or tattoos. Current photographs of your pet will help with identification after a disaster. You should also send photos of your pet to your out-of-state friend or relative.

Know your cat and dog's common and favorite hiding places, Once the chaos starts, this is where you will find them.

Make a list of the places where you can get veterinary care, food, shelter and housing for your pets in an emergency. Find out what they provide and what they would need from you. Make a commitment to gather this information now. Special facilities may be required for birds or exotic animals.

PREPAREDNESS

Develop an emergency plan and practice it

- How can you get started with emergency preparedness? The following recommendations will help reduce the impact of a disaster.
- Start by imagining the types of disaster that you might encounter. This is the first step toward developing an effective disaster plan.
- Develop a general family disaster plan. Information can be obtained from your county emergency management office.
- Practice evacuation of your family and pets until you can evacuate within a few minutes. Everybody in the family should participate. Including your pet.
- Decide on a place where your family will meet if you get separated.
- Decide who will take care of your pet and where he or she will stay during a crisis.
- Determine the best room in the house to leave your pet if you must evacuate without your pet. This will vary with the type of pet you own and the type of disaster.
- Make arrangements for pet care with family and friends.
- The best emergency plans involve many people and systems that can back each other up. Here are some people and groups you need to get involved:
 - ✓ family
 - ✓ friends
 - ✓ your veterinarian
 - ✓ your local humane shelter
 - ✓ local boarding and grooming kennels, and
 - ✓ local hotels and motels in your area that accept pets.

Accustom your pets to sudden actions as would be needed in a disaster

Actions taken in preparation for a disaster include the following:

- Train your dog. Obedience may save its life during an emergency and help make it a welcome guest.
- Familiarize your pet with its transport crate before a crisis.
- Familiarize your pet with being transported. You can practice drills with your pet by getting it used to riding with you in your car. That way it will not be unduly alarmed if it has to evacuate in a disaster.
- Cats can be very difficult to catch when they are stressed or afraid. Practice catching and transporting your cat in a crate and carrying it around the house. This will allow your pet to become familiar with the transport box.

Prepare a disaster kit for each pet

You should have a disaster kit for each pet. Do not store kits in the kitchen or the garage. These are frequently the area where fires start. Kits and their contents should be easily retrieved and kept in rodent and ant-proof containers. Check the contents of the disaster kits twice a year when the clocks change for daylight savings. Rotate all food into use and replace with fresh food every two months.

- ❖ Extra Collars and tags, harnesses and leashes for all pets (including cats).
- ❖ Muzzles may be need to control agitated and aggressive animals.
- ❖ Extra pet food to avoid diet changes in stressful situations.
- ❖ Toys or blankets your pet will find familiar.
- ❖ A manual can opener
- ❖ A supply of stored drinking water.
- ❖ Food, water and bowls or each pet.
- ❖ Paper towel, plastic bags, and spray disinfectant for animal waste clean up.
- ❖ Copies of your pet's medical and vaccination records. Boarding facilities may not accept pets without proof of health.
 - ✓ If your pet is on medication, ask your vet for a copy of the prescription for the medications in your kit. Mark your calendar to replace medications before they expire.
- ❖ Include a recent photo of your pet.
- ❖ Your crate should be easily accessible and large enough for your pet to stand up and turn around. You should also label the crate with you pet's name and where you can be reached.

All these items can be stored in a sturdy carrier or travel crate with the pet's name/address and phone number written with a permanent marker. You should include the number where you can be reached. With kittens or cats include a pillowcase or EvackSack.

Exotic pets: Exotic pets such as reptiles and birds will require additional items that are species specific. Items such as secure caging, appropriate food, bedding and alternate heat source, covers and proper identification and instructions for care. Snakes can be transported in a pillowcase or EvackSack .

A first aid should include only materials that you know how to use. Remember that if your pet has a problem and you do not know exactly what it is, you should consult a veterinarian.

Response

Several actions will help ensure a safe response to a disaster. These are listed below.

- Stay calm and assess the situation.
- Never put yourself or others at risk. Do not attempt to rescue your pet if your life or health or that of others may be placed in danger.
- Crate your cat or dog immediately. If you do not, your pet may sense danger. This will make them want to hide and they become more difficult to catch and crate.
- Listen to the emergency alert system on your radio or television for instructions on what you should do and whether special arrangements have been made for people with pets. Follow these guidelines and incorporate them into your actions.
- If your pet has been exposed to chemicals, get information on how to handle without harming yourself. You should have identified sources of veterinary care and other information in your emergency plan

In some situations, circumstances may force you to leave your pet behind. Leaving your pet behind is only a last resort. If you must leave without your pet, you should leave them in your home. Under these conditions, the following advice should be helpful.

- If you must leave your pets at home, prepare an area on the inside of your home such as a bathroom or utility room. Rooms without windows are safer and less upsetting for your pets. Do not house cats and dogs together however friendly they might normally be.
- All pets should be wearing collars with proper identification tags. Leave enough food and water to last at least 3 days. Place a sign on the door of your home stating what animals are being housed inside and where they are located. Leave a telephone number of the location you can be reached. Leashes should be hung in an area close to where the pet is being confined.

- Under no circumstances should you ever leave your pet tied up outside or let them loose to fend for themselves. Roaming dogs are a public health hazard and owners remain responsible for any injuries. Where loose animals become a problem, animal control shelters often have no other option than to treat these animals as abandoned. Many pets have to be adopted, fostered, or euthanized.
- Always keep exotic pets in separate rooms. Many exotic pets can be very dangerous to disaster personnel and other animals not familiar with them, or to those who encounter them unexpectedly. Leave warnings and handling instructions for all exotics, especially poisonous ones.
- Paste labels clearly for rescue workers to see what animals they will encounter, how many and where they can contact somebody familiar with how to take care of them.
- Make sure somebody knows where you can be contacted and what the needs and location of your pets are.
- **Leaving your pet behind in a disaster may decrease its chances of survival.**

Special recommendations for birds

The following actions are specially recommended for birds.

- Check your bird for injury and exposure to chemicals. If you have concerns about the health of your birds, contact a veterinarian. If you think or know that your bird has been exposed to chemicals, contact your veterinarian before treating it yourself.
- Many avian and exotics will show signs of disease (respiratory, gastrointestinal, etc.) several days after a stressful episode. This is very common in birds. Any bird showing signs of lethargy, loss of appetite, depression or injury should be evaluated by a veterinarian. If the animal is bleeding, apply direct pressure with a small piece of cotton cloth until you can get help. Do not remove the cloth as this may start the bleeding again.
- If you have to move to new surroundings, do not remove your bird from its cage. When birds are frightened, they may become aggressive or fly away.
- If electricity is available, many birds benefit from having a heating pad under the cage in times of stress. Blankets placed over the cage can also minimize stress.

RECOVERY

When the disaster has passed, it is not uncommon to find that once familiar surroundings have been rearranged. Pets that rely on visual and olfactory (scent) cues may become disoriented.

Here are some guidelines that may help you through the recovery period.

- Check your pet for injury and exposure to chemicals. If you have any concerns about the health of your pet or their exposure to hazardous materials, contact a veterinarian before you attempt to treat them.
- If you have to move to new surroundings, do not remove your pet from its crate until it is calm. Do so only in a closed room.
- Be careful in allowing your cat or dog out after a major disaster. Follow the recommendations of the emergency management personnel as to whether the environment is safe for you and your pet.
- Give your pet small amounts of food and water several times throughout the day. The volumes of food may be increased to normal over three to four days.
- Let your pet have plenty of uninterrupted sleep. If you still have your pet's favorite toys, encourage them to play. This will allow them to recover from the stress and trauma.
- Avoid unfamiliar activities with your pet, such as bathing, exercise, or diet supplements. Try to avoid diet changes.
- If you and your pet are separated, pay daily visits to local shelter, animal control facilities, veterinary offices and kennels until you have found it. A phone call is often not as affective as a visit. You can also post photos of your lost pet. If your pet has tattoos, a microchip or other permanent identification, this will increase the chances of finding it. Be aware that collars and tags are sometimes lost.
- If you find stray animals take it to a shelter or other facility set up for lost and found animals. Place an advertisement in the local newspaper to inform the owner where the pet was taken. Often newspapers run lost & found ads for free.
- Share your experiences with friends and family. Talking about your experiences will help you deal with them and offers great stress relief.
- Consider seeking professional counseling, as recovery is aided when guided by professionals experienced in dealing with disaster.

CHECLIST FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR PETS

Do you have the following items ready?

- Your written family disaster plan
- Disaster preparedness kit
- Crate and bedding
- Food, water, manual can opener, and dishes
- Plastic bags, paper towels, newspaper (when shredded, can be used as cat litter), disinfectant
- Collar, leash, harnesses
- Muzzles, gauze rolls
- Identification tags
- Current medical and vaccination records
- Extra bottles of daily medications or copies of prescriptions with current expiration date
- Current photos
- Pet comfort items; towels, blankets, toys
- A list of hotels, motels and boarding kennels that accept pets
- Detailed instructions for animals care and rescue workers.
- First aid kit
- Flashlights, batteries
- Copies of health certificates
- Out-of-telephone contact
- Flat tire repair kit

