

Preparing for a Disaster/Emergency

Compiled by Kathy Covey:

The key to survival during a disaster, crisis or emergency is to be as prepared as possible before the storm hits. Take the time to make a plan and assemble an emergency kit for you and your pet. By taking these steps now, you will greatly increase your pet's chances of survival.

Prepare for Everyday Emergencies

These are example scenarios that could happen to you at any time, anywhere in the country. Prepare yourself for these events, and if a large disaster should ever hit, you will be ready and know what to do:

- The roads are icy, traffic is a mess and you decide to stay with a friend instead of risking the drive home from school or work. Who will check on your cat and feed her?
- While you were out running errands, a propane truck overturned on the street near your neighborhood and you are not allowed to go home. A police officer tells you the electricity to your neighborhood was shut off. How can you make sure your birds stay warm?
- Your mother-in-law has had a heart attack and you are going to meet your wife at the hospital. It may be a long night. Who will give your dog his medicine?

It is recommends the following actions to make sure your pets are taken care of when everyday events like these prevent you from taking care of your pets:

- Find a trusted neighbor and give them a key to your house or barn. Make sure this person is comfortable and familiar with your pets.
- Make sure the neighbor knows your pets' whereabouts and habits, so they will not have to waste precious time trying to find or catch them.
- Create a pet emergency/disaster kit and place it in a prominent place where your neighbor can find it.
- If the emergency involves evacuation, make sure the neighbor would be willing to take your pets and has access to the appropriate carriers and leashes. Plan to meet at a prearranged location.



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Make a plan to include your pets.

- If you use a pet sitting service, they may be available to help, but discuss the possibility well in advance.

Disaster Supply Checklist for Pets

Every member of your family should know what he or she needs to take when you evacuate. You also need to prepare supplies for your pet. Stock up on non-perishables well ahead of time, and have everything ready to go at a moment's notice. Keep everything accessible, stored in sturdy containers (duffel bags, covered trash containers, etc.) that can be carried easily.

If you reside in an area prone to certain seasonal disasters, such as flooding or hurricanes that might require evacuation, create a kit to keep in your car.

In your pet disaster kit, you should include:

- **Food and water for at least five days** for each pet, bowls and a manual can opener if you are packing canned pet food.
- **Medications and medical records** stored in a waterproof container and a first aid kit. A pet first aid book is also good to include.
- **Cat litter box, litter**, garbage bags to collect all pets' waste, and litter scoop.
- **Sturdy leashes, harnesses, and carriers** to transport pets safely and to ensure that your pets can't escape. Carriers should be large enough for the animal to stand comfortably, turn around and lie down. Your pet may have to stay in the carrier for hours at a time while you are away from home. Be sure to have a secure cage with no loose objects inside it to accommodate smaller pets. These may require blankets or towels for bedding and warmth, and other special items.
- **Current photos and descriptions** of your pets to help others identify them in case you and your pets become separated and to prove that they are yours.
- **Pet beds and toys**, if you can easily take them, to reduce stress.
- **Information about your pets'** feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems, and the name and number of your veterinarian in case you have to board your pets or place them in foster care.

Other useful items include newspapers, paper towels, plastic trash bags, grooming items and household bleach.

Your Pet's Kit

Include these items in your pet's emergency kit:

- Food, water and medicines for five days.
- Medical and veterinary records.
- Carrier, toys, blanket or bed
- Litter box and litter.
- ID attached to your pet.
- Pet carrier and/or leash.
- Current photos of pet with physical description.
- Container to carry everything.

Find a Safe Place Ahead of Time

Because evacuation shelters generally don't accept pets (except for service animals), you must plan ahead to make certain your family and pets will have a safe place to stay. Don't wait until disaster strikes to do your research.

- Contact hotels and motels outside your immediate area to check policies on accepting pets. Ask about any restrictions on number, size and species. Inquire if the "no pet" policies would be waived in an emergency. Make a list of animal-friendly places and keep it handy. Call ahead for a reservation as soon as you think you might have to leave your home.
- Check with friends, relatives or others outside your immediate area. Ask if they would be able to shelter you and your animals or just your animals, if necessary. If you have more than one pet, you may need to house them at separate locations.
- Make a list of boarding facilities and veterinary offices that might be able to shelter animals in emergencies; include 24-hour telephone numbers.
- Ask your local animal shelter if it provides foster care or shelter for pets in an emergency. This should be your last resort, as shelters have limited resources and are likely to be stretched to their limits during an emergency.

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.

- 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.

If you use a pet-sitting service, it may be able to help, but discuss the possibility well in advance.



CAT

Don't Forget ID

Your pet should be wearing up-to-date identification at all times. This includes adding your current cell phone number to your pet's tag. It may also be a good idea to include the phone number of a friend or relative outside your immediate area—if your pet is lost, you'll want to provide a number on the tag that will be answered even if you're out of your home.

When You Evacuate, Take Your Pets With You

Visible ID is important. The single most important thing you can do to protect your pets is to take them with you when you evacuate. Animals left behind in a disaster can easily be injured, lost or killed. Animals left inside your home can escape through storm-damaged areas, such as broken windows. Animals turned loose to fend for themselves are likely to become victims of exposure,

starvation, predators, contaminated food or water, or accidents. Leaving dogs tied or chained outside in a disaster is a death sentence.

- If you leave, even if you think you may only be gone for a few hours, take your animals. When you leave, you have no way of knowing how long you'll be kept out of the area, and you may not be able to go back for your pets.
- Leave early—don't wait for a mandatory evacuation order. An unnecessary trip is far better than waiting too long to leave safely with your pets. If you wait to be evacuated by emergency officials, you may be told to leave your pets behind.

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; if you have to evacuate, you will not have to spend time trying to find them. 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.

After the Storm

Planning and preparation will help you survive the disaster, but your home may be a very different place afterward, whether you have taken shelter at home or elsewhere.

- Don't allow your pets to roam loose. Familiar landmarks and smells might be gone, and your pet will probably be disoriented. Pets can easily get lost in such situations.
- While you assess the damage, keep dogs on leashes and keep cats in carriers inside the house. If your house is damaged, they could escape and become lost.
- 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.