

Preparing You for Emergencies: Caring for Pets During a Disaster



Pets enrich our lives in more ways than we can count. In turn, they depend on us for their safety and well-being. Here's how you can be prepared 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. If you are a pet owner, that plan must include your pets. Being prepared can save their lives.

Different disasters require different responses. But whether the disaster is a tornado or a hazardous spill, you may have to evacuate your home. If you must evacuate, the most important thing you can do to protect your pets is to evacuate them as well. Leaving them behind, even if you try to create a safe place, is likely to result in their being injured, lost, or worse. So prepare now.

Have a Safe Place to Take Your Pets



Red Cross disaster shelters cannot accept pets because of health and safety regulations and other considerations. Service animals that assist people with disabilities are the only exception. 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.

Contact hotels and motels 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 your other disaster information and supplies. If you are impacted by a disaster and you must evacuate, call ahead to reserve a room.

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.

Assemble a Portable Pet Disaster Supplies Kit

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 (duffel bags, covered trash containers). Your pet disaster supplies kit should include:

- Medications and medical records (stored in a waterproof container) and a first aid kit.
- Sturdy leashes, harnesses, and/or carriers to transport pets safely and ensure that your animals can't escape.
- Current photos of your pets in case they get lost.
- Food, potable water, bowls, cat litter and pan, and can opener.
- 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.
- Pet beds and toys, if easily transportable.

Know What to Do

- At the first hint of disaster, act to protect your pet.
- Check to be sure your pet disaster supplies are ready to take at a moment's notice.
- Bring all pets into the house so 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 that are securely fastened with up-to-date identification.



You may not be home when the evacuation order comes. Find out if a trusted neighbor would be willing to take your pets and meet you at a prearranged location. This person should be comfortable with your pets, know where your animals are likely to be, know where your pet disaster supply kit is kept and have a key to your home. If you use a pet sitting service, they may be available to help, but discuss the possibility well in advance.

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, as they can run off. The most trustworthy pets may panic, hide, try to escape or even bite or scratch. When you return home, give your pets time to settle back into their routines. Consult your veterinarian if any behavioral problems persist.

Links:

<http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/animals.shtm>

http://www.hsus.org/video_clips/page.jsp?itemID=27259490

http://www.avma.org/disaster/saving_family.asp