

Disaster Preparedness for Pets

Although we all like to think “It will never happen to me,” disasters can strike anyone at any time. However, it is estimated that the United States suffers over 150,000 household fire, 10,000 violent thunderstorms, 5,000 floods, 800 tornadoes, many forest fires, and several hurricanes and earthquakes every year.

Disasters Often Strike Quickly and Unannounced

Often you cannot prevent a disaster from occurring but you can reduce the impact of a disaster on your family. A little planning goes a long way toward reducing injuries, death, and suffering. This applies to your pets as well as to yourself. You and your pets will need shelter, water, and food.

During and after a disaster you remain responsible for your pet. Your pet will be completely dependent on you for its survival and well-being. To ensure that your pet’s needs are met, as well as your own, you should have an emergency response plan and readily accessible kits with provisions for family members and pets.

Develop an Emergency Plan and Practice It

You can make things go a lot more smoothly if you prepare yourself and your pet for disasters and emergencies. During an emergency you are less likely to panic if you know what to do. How can you get started?

Here are some ideas and experiences that may help you and your animals be better prepared for a disaster:

1. Develop a general family disaster plan. The American Red Cross has excellent materials for this and has great brochures that will help you and your children in developing and exercising your plan. All you need to do is add your specific plans for your pet.
2. Decide on a place where your family will meet if you get separated.
3. Decide who will take care of your pet and where he or she will stay during a crisis.
4. 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.
5. Make a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of places where you can get veterinary care, food, shelter, and housing for your pets in an emergency. You are most likely going to be able to stay with friends and family. Other places include veterinarians, humane shelters, animal control, kennels, and hotels and motels that allow pets to stay.
6. Think of whom you would phone out of your area. Often people cannot phone into a disaster zone, but it is possible to phone out. An out-of-state contact can help relay information and keep your family connected.
7. Keep a supply of change for pay phones because they will probably be the first public communication to resume.

Accustom Your Pets to Sudden Actions as Would be Needed in a Disaster

1. Train your pet. Obedience may save its life during an emergency and will make it a more welcome guest.
2. 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 the pet will not be unduly alarmed by a trip to avoid a disaster.
3. Practice evacuation of your family and pets. Continue to practice evacuation until you can evacuate within a few minutes. Everybody in the family should participate, including your pets. Have fun!

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. Kits and their contents should be easily retrieved and kept in rodent-and ant-proof containers. Remember to check the contents of the disaster kits by going through them twice a year when the clocks change. Replace food every 2 months. Here are some items that are recommended for your disaster kit:

1. A collar with tags, harness, muzzle, and leashes for each pet. (Remember that even the most gentle animal may become aggressive when frightened.)

A transport carrier for your pet. The carrier should be easily accessible and large enough for your pet to stand up and turn around. Since animals may be sheltered in open facilities, make sure there is enough bedding to keep them warm. You should also label the crate with your pet's name, your name, and where you can be reached.

1. Extra pet food so that your pet avoids a diet change in a stressful situation.
2. Pack toys or blankets your pet will find familiar.
3. A manual can opener.
4. A supply of stored drinking water.
5. Food, water, and bowls for each pet (Figure water consumption at a quart per each ten pounds of your pet per day.)
6. Paper towel, plastic bags, and spray disinfectant for animal waste cleanup.
7. Copies of your pet's medical and vaccination records. Boarding facilities may not accept your pets without proof of health.
8. Extra medication. If your pet is on medication, ask your veterinarian about keeping extra supplies of medication or for a copy of the prescription for these medications in your kit. Mark your calendar to replace medications before they expire.
9. A recent photo.
10. A First Aid kit with 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. Useful items for a First Aid kit for pets include bandaging materials to cover wounds, antiseptic ointment, clippers, latex gloves, and tweezers.
11. Flat tire repair kit.