

Emergency Contingency Plan for Animal Care Businesses

The purpose of the Emergency Contingency Plan (ECP) is to be prepared for any type of disaster. These could be natural disasters that affect many businesses and people in the area or small-scale disasters that affect only one business. Examples of common local disasters in practices and animal shelters are chemical spills, fires, and heating and cooling failure. These are also common in large-scale disasters. The emphasis of the ECP is for individual practices to be prepared. OSHA recommends that an ECP have a standard format in which each hazard is addressed separately and responsibilities are clearly designated and that staff and management be trained to an appropriate level of knowledge for each aspect of the plan.

An ECP should include a written evacuation plan and procedures for contacting the appropriate person in an emergency, such as natural disasters, hazardous material spills, transportation accident, injury to somebody at work, injury to clients, and danger of transmission of zoonotic disease. The ECP should be in writing, and copies should be kept in every area of the building.

Developing an Emergency Contingency Plan

Emergencies are common in animal care industries because employees frequently deal with hazardous materials, such as large quantities of bleach, anesthetic gases, diluents, stains, and toxic drugs. Also, many parts of the United States are prone to natural disasters that will affect veterinary practices and humane shelters as much as other businesses and homes. Therefore it should be considered an elementary safety and security measure for all employees to know how to prevent emergencies, how to recognize them, and how to deal with them when they do occur.

One of the most important components of an ECP is the evacuation plan. Unfortunately, in many practices and shelters evacuation planning is reduced to minimal requirements of having evacuation routes posted in each room. Few practices have ever held drills for evacuation of personnel, animals, and valuable items, such as medical and accounting records. To my knowledge none of our veterinary schools have evacuated their animals in recent years as part of a drill or discussed this with their students. The same applies to many veterinary hospitals and humane shelters. However, emergency evacuation plans should become a standard part of practice management and animal care. Evacuation plans also offer an opportunity to interact with the public, media, and emergency management officials. Testing evacuation plans is educational and can be fun.

Table 15-1 Resources in the community that can contribute to the development of disaster preparedness programs for animals and their owners

Group	Services and resources
Community emergency management agency	Advice on developing plans Information on local hazards (natural and technologic)
Mayor or community administrator's office	Contacts in the community Development of community priorities
Local emergency planning committee	Integration of veterinary services Awareness of needs and resources of the animal care industry
Fire department	Business fire safety Knowing what likely hazards would be in a veterinary practice or humane shelter
Police department	Knowing where water supplies are Business and personal safety Crime prevention
Emergency Medical Services organizations	First aid training Emergency Medical Management training
American Red Cross	Triage Disaster services First aid CPR
National Weather Service	Community services Storm prediction
Public works department	Access routes and their vulnerability Utility supply and backup
Planning commission	Location planning Floodplain identification Business area development
Telephone companies	Vulnerability to communication failure Prioritization of communications restoration
Electric utility companies	Alternative communications source Vulnerability to power failure Power alternatives
Neighboring businesses	Hazard analysis Alternative business location Alternative communication system
Hazardous materials response organizations	Education on in-house and neighborhood hazardous materials Control of public and environmental safety
Contractors	Disaster proofing buildings Retrofitting buildings Priorities for rebuilding
Suppliers of emergency equipment	Supplies for staff, customers, and patients
Insurance carriers	Insurance coverage Educational materials Incentives