

Engaging in Preparedness

There are three levels of disaster preparedness in which you can become involved:

- Personal preparedness at work through emergency contingency planning in accordance with guidelines of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- Business preparedness through business resumption planning in the case of a major disaster
- Community preparedness as community leaders in veterinary emergency management for the care of animals and their owners in disasters. Such programs can be developed correctly only under the guidance of the local Emergency Management Agency (EMA). In this context veterinary practices and humane shelters should be considered “critical facilities.”

The three areas should be seen as sequential steps for becoming involved in disaster management programs. In particular, the types of problems that will occur in a veterinary practice, humane shelter, or pet and feed store in a disaster are likely to be the same as in everyday operations; they just occur on a larger scale.

Disasters do not create new conditions; they merely exacerbate existing ones. Therefore learning to deal with common problems that occur frequently and locally and are dealt with through local resources is the best way for groups to prepare themselves and their communities for large-scale disasters. Local disaster preparedness is also best because it follows the priorities of those who are permanently vested in the local community.

The steps for developing plans at all levels are the same:

- Conduct a risk assessment analysis.
- Identify critical functions.
- Conduct a vulnerability assessment.
- Prepare a plan and exercise it.

The American Red Cross (ARC) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) summarize the reasons for disaster preparedness in businesses:

- It facilitates compliance with regulatory requirements of federal, state, and local agencies.
- It enhances a company’s ability to recover from financial losses, regulatory fines, loss of market share, damage to equipment or products, or business interruption.
- It reduces exposure to civil or criminal liability in the event of an incident.
- It enhances a company’s image and credibility with employees, customers, suppliers, and the community.
- It may reduce insurance premiums.
- It helps companies fulfill their moral responsibility to protect employees, the community, and the environment.