

## **Sheltering of animals**

After some evacuations (e.g., after tornadoes and blizzards), animals will need shelter. Staff should be familiar with the conditions under which shelter may need to be sought and where that shelter space is. Evacuation procedures should include guidelines for determining the need for shelter and obtaining it. For example, during the tornado season veterinary practices should listen to the weather radio, so that if there is a tornado warning, they do not start surgery. If shelters are occupied, the need for emergency supplies (water, food, and medical and sanitary supplies for both humans and animals) has to be determined. This is particularly important for areas where blizzards or hurricanes can prevent contact with the outside world for several days. Shelters should be supervised by a single person in charge, and others should follow this person's directions, as described in Chapters 17 and 18, which deal with veterinary incident management.

## **Hazard-Specific Plans**

In addition to hazard communication and a written ECP, it is advisable to have hazard-specific plans. For businesses in the animal care industry an ECP should address general issues, such as fire, anesthesia, radiation, accidents, infections, chemicals, and animal escapes.

## **Fire**

The most common hazard-specific plan is for fire prevention. These plans are best developed in consultation with the local fire department. Experts will be able to inspect the buildings and provide firsthand expert advice on fire prevention and use of fire extinguishers and other equipment. Insurance companies are also good sources of education and incentives for fire hazard reduction. Accepting advice from an insurance agent may result in lower insurance premiums.

A first step in fire prevention is to distribute fire safety information to employees on prevention, containment, evacuation, and reporting. That material should include instructions for employees to evacuate by using stairs, not elevators, in a fire. This may be most applicable in research facilities, which are often bigger buildings, and where neither people nor animals can be evacuated via elevators. Staff should know that they should crawl instead of walk in a fire. Employee fire wardens should be assigned specific duties such as monitoring the shutdown and evacuation.

General procedures and policies that prevent fires include safe storage, instructions for safe handling of flammable materials and safe disposal of containers for smoking materials (or establishment of nonsmoking policies), and placement of fire extinguishers in strategic locations. Compressed gas cylinders should be stored in cool, dry places that are protected from heat. Staff should know that cylinders must be secured each time they are replaced. Staff should be instructed on how to use fire extinguishers, preferably by actually using one in an exercise.

## **Animal-specific hazards**

In many cases OSHA regulations do not address animal-related issues. However, it is important to realize that animal care businesses do have special concerns related to animals and should address them. Two special concerns regarding animals are that they can act as fomites of hazardous materials and that they can escape. Preventing these should be an important part of any veterinary practice or animal shelter ECP.

The details concerning animals are not specifically required by OSHA other than in the sense that escaped animals are a potential source of injury to persons. However, a comprehensive ECP

and hazard communication for veterinary practices and animal shelters will include instructions on preventing animal escapes and preventing persons from being injured in the process.

Animals that are contaminated can act as fomites of hazardous materials and readily expose many persons. Also, animals that escape are a danger to themselves, persons, and the environment and create liability issues for the business under whose care they are when they escape.

### **Miscellaneous**

If a disaster strikes during work hours, businesses will need to have supplies on hand to feed staff members and provide them with water. Adequate supplies should be stored at the practice, and employees should know where additional supplies could be obtained should they be needed.

Special attention should be given to the preservation of critical records in evacuations, including medical records (especially of patients at the time), accounts, and MSDS compilations. Batteries should be replaced regularly in telephones and answering and fax machines to ensure that incoming messages can be recorded.

Regular maintenance of inventory lists is essential for filing meaningful claims after a disaster. There are a number of ways to store this information. Some businesses are well organized enough to compile written lists of equipment. These lists, like all other vital records, should be stored off site. Other methods include the use of software programs and the videotaping of all equipment and supplies every 6 months. This provides a powerful visual document of the value of the business. An inventory list should include interior and exterior design fixtures.

All businesses should have an emergency warning (weather radio) system and emergency lighting, which should be permanently installed, operational, and tested regularly.