

Disaster Preparedness for Your Pets

The recent fires in California have taught us that we need to be prepared, sometimes with very little notice, to take action. Careful planning is especially important for animals with special needs, who may not be ambulatory or may need certain medications regularly.

Remember if it isn't safe for you, it isn't safe for your pets.

- Don't wait to get ready. Always bring pets indoors at the first sign or warning of a storm, disaster or evacuation and load them into their carriers. Pets can become disoriented and wander away from home in a crisis or become fearful and hide inside or be difficult to load into a carrier. Discuss with your vet some natural supplement that may be useful to help your animal companion stay calm.
- If you have a fire or earthquake drill for your family, include your pets. Practice makes perfect and can be a fun team building exercise. Who is in charge of what?? Time it. Make sure everyone knows what their role is so that safe evacuation can go smoothly.
- Make sure all pets wear collars and tags with up-to-date identification information. Have their name and your name, cell number. Make sure your pets are Microchipped! It's easy, inexpensive and could be lifesaving. If they are microchipped, it's very important to make sure your information is up to date. If your pet does get lost, you want them to be able to find you. To keep your information current just go to the website of your microchip company, such as HomeAgain or 24PetWatch.
- Make a list of places that can shelter your pet in an emergency - a hotel, kennel, veterinary clinic or the home of a family member or friend. Ideally, you'll want to keep your pet with you, but that may not be possible. Also, consider making sure someone has access to your home that knows your pet(s) and can retrieve them if you aren't home.
- In addition to the human emergency kits, you should have one for your pet. It should include:
 - Pet first-aid kit.
 - At least seven days' worth of bottled water for each person and pet (also rotate every two months).
 - At least 7 days' worth of canned or dry food (be sure to rotate every two months).
 - Litter box, litter and scoop for cats and poop bags for dogs.
 - Pet feeding dishes and water bowls.
 - Extra collar or harnesses and an extra leash.
 - Photocopies and/or USB of medical records and a two-week supply of any medicine your pet requires in a waterproof container (Remember, like food, medications need to be rotated out of your emergency kit). An up to date vaccination record is very important as shelters may ask for proof they are current in order to stay.

- A traveling bag, crate or sturdy carrier, ideally one for each pet. Carriers should be large enough for the animal to stand comfortably, turn around, and lie down. Your pet may have to stay in the carrier for a long time while away from home so you should also have bedding and blankets for comfort and warmth.
- Recent photos of your pets.

If you don't have to evacuate and your family and pets must wait out a storm or other disaster at home, identify a safe area where you can all stay together. Keep dogs on leashes and cats in carriers, and make sure they are wearing identification. Also consider natural calming supplements to help them cope with the stress of the crisis.

There are also considerations for other pets you may have:

Horses

- Before choosing a boarding facility, make sure that they have trailers at the ready to get your horse out of harm's way. Make sure to ask what the procedure is in case of an evacuation. Fires can spread very quickly and trying to get them out at the last minute can end in disaster. Horses must be led out of the barn, sometimes with eyes covered and walked onto a trailer waiting for them. If this is not the set up then do not board your horse at that facility.
- *Set up a phone tree/buddy system with other nearby horse owners and local farms. This could prove invaluable should you—or they—need to evacuate animals or share resources like trailers, pastures or extra hands!*
- Regularly maintain and inspect stables, pastures, and grounds for hazards and anything that may block entrances and exits.
- Get your horse used to trailering. Periodically, you should practice quickly getting your horse on a trailer for the same reason that schools have fire drills.
- If you own a trailer, please inspect it regularly. Also, make sure your towing vehicle is appropriate for the size and weight of the trailer and horse. Always make sure the trailer is hitched properly—and emergency brake battery charged and linked to towing vehicle.
- As with other pets, keep equine veterinary records in a safe place where they can quickly be reached. You should also keep a copy for emergency services at the stables that includes phone numbers for you, your emergency contact, your 24-hour veterinarian and several friends.
- Make sure you have researched other stables barns outside the area that can board your horse temporarily.
- Make sure trailers have ample fresh water in case they have to go on long rides. Trailer rides can be very stressful, so try to offset as much as possible by stopping every few hours (if a reasonable option) to allow to graze and drink fresh water.

Birds

- Birds should be transported in a secure travel cage or carrier.

- In cold weather, make certain you have a blanket over your bird's cage. This may also help reduce the stress of traveling. In warm weather, carry a spray bottle to periodically moisten your bird's feathers.
- Have recent photos available, and keep your bird's leg bands on for identification.

Reptiles

- A snake may be transported in a pillowcase, but you should try to have permanent and secure housing for him when you reach a safe place.
- Take a sturdy bowl that is large for your pet to soak in. It's also a good idea to bring along a heating pad or other warming devise, such as a hot water bottle.
- Lizards can be transported like birds (see above).

Small Mammals

- Small animals, such as hamsters, gerbils, mice and guinea pigs, should be transported in secure carriers with bedding materials, food and food bowls.

Being prepared for a crisis gives us the best chance at success!