

# HURRICANE AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR PETS

Every year in June, we are warned to prepare our families for hurricanes, floods and other natural disasters that occur during the summer months. However, we often forget to plan for our pets and other animals. Such oversight, particularly during an emergency evacuation, is likely to result in their being injured, lost or worse. Hurricane Katrina pointed out this lack of planning in a very painful and dire manner. Disasters can happen anywhere and preparations should not be limited to those who live in hurricane prone areas. A preparedness plan is crucial no matter where you may live and should include a disaster supplies kit and a written plan, and if at all possible, get some first aid and CPR training for pets.

## **MAKE A PLAN**

When a major disaster threatens your area and you are ordered to evacuate, **the most important thing you can do to protect your pets is to evacuate them.** If it is not safe for you to stay at home, then it is not safe for your animals. NEVER leave a animal tied up outside to a tree or fence. In harsh weather, they could be choked, hung or drowned. If you leave your pet indoors you are risking the possibility of your pet drowning due to floods from tidal surges which could trap your animal in a house filling rapidly with water. Pets left unattended in a threatening storm can easily become frightened and slip outdoors. Lost pets are likely to die from exposure, starvation, predators ad/or contaminated food and water.

Make provisions now for where they will go. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to find shelter for your animals in the midst of a disaster. Most Red Cross disaster shelters and many hotels and motels cannot accept pets (with the exception of service pets.)

Do some research to find the best shelter for your pets. Ask friends or relatives outside your area if they might be able to shelter your animals in an emergency. If you have more than one pet, consider whether or not they would be more comfortable if kept together. Contact hotels and motels outside of your area to find if they are pet friendly and if there are restrictions on size, breed, species, etc. Ask if “no pet” policies might be relaxed in an emergency. Prepare a list of boarding facilities and veterinarians who could shelter animals in an emergency. Remember that if an area is ordered to evacuate, local animal shelters, veterinarians, and boarding facilities may not be able to accommodate your pets so all of your potential shelters should be out of the affected area. Create a list of “pet friendly” places, including phone numbers, addresses, directions, etc. and keep this information with your disaster supplies.

## **KEEP YOUR PETS UP-TO-DATE ON ALL VACCINATIONS**

Animal clinics and boarding kennels will not accept animals that are not current on their vaccinations (rabies, bordatella, distemper, etc.) Check with your veterinarian to make sure your pets are current. Keep copies of their vaccination certificates and health records in your disaster kit.

## **MAKE SURE YOUR PET HAS IDENTIFICATION**

Get a properly fitted collar with current rabies tag and identification tag with your name and address. You may want to consider getting your pet micro chipped or tattooed. Collars and ID tags can be lost; microchips and tattoos can't. If your animal had been micro chipped or tattooed, make sure your recovery system has your current address and phone number. Take photos of your pets together with you, and keep them in a safe place. This can make identification much easier in case you are separated from them at some point.

## **BUILD A KIT**

Naturally, when families prepare for a disaster, they begin assembling their disaster supplies kit with batteries, water, food and other things they'll need during an emergency. Pets need their own disaster

supplies kit. Whether for a day or a week, use this checklist to make sure they're prepared.

Food, potable water, bowls, manual can opener, cat litter pan, litter. (Pop-top cans or freeze dried packets work well)

Pet beds and toys, if easily transportable

Sturdy leashes, harnesses, muzzles, and/or carriers to transport pets safely and ensure that your animals can't escape.

Portable kennels (collapsible ones work well and don't take up as much space in the home) Don't wait until a storm is threatening, since kennels sell out quickly in the stores right before a storm. It's a good idea to stock up early. Make sure your name, address, and phone numbers are imprinted somewhere on the kennel.

Current photo of your pet.

Cleaning supplies, plastic bags, paper towels, newspapers, etc.

Blankets, toys, hygiene items such as brushes, combs, toothbrushes, first-aid kits, with tweezers, cotton batting, gauze bandages, adhesive tape, first-aid cream (triple antibiotic), antiseptic spray, hydrogen peroxide, rectal thermometer, scissors, medications (including heartworm and flea/tick prevention, sedatives, motion sickness pills, medical records, first-aid kit.

Information on feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems, and the name and number of your veterinarian in case you have to foster or board your pets.

Store these items in a sturdy, waterproof container that is easy to carry. These kits are great in any emergency, so prepare them now and make sure they are easily accessible.

### **CARING FOR BIRDS**

Birds should be transported in a secure travel cage or carrier. In cold weather, wrap a blanket over the carrier and warm up the car before placing birds inside. During warm weather, carry a plant mister to mist the bird's feathers periodically. Do not put water inside the carrier during transport. Provide a few slices of fresh fruits and vegetables with high water content. Have a photo for identification and leg bands. If the carrier does not have a perch, line it with paper towels and change them frequently. Try to keep the carrier in a quiet area. Do not let the birds out of the cage or carrier.

### **REPTILES**

Snakes can be transported in a pillowcase, but they must be transferred to more secure housing when they reach the evacuation site. If your snakes require frequent feedings, carry food with you. Take a water bowl large enough for soaking as well as a heating pad. When transporting house lizards, follow the same directions as for birds. It is imperative that you take the complete habitats for iguanas, chameleons and other exotics that require specific environments.

### **POCKET PETS**

Small mammals (hamsters, gerbils, etc.) should be transported in secure containers suitable for maintaining the animals when sheltered. Take bedding materials, food bowls, and water bottles.

### **GET TRAINED**

What would you do if your pet had a medical emergency during an evacuation? Being trained in Pet First Aid or CPR can make the difference in critical situations when emergency veterinarians are not available. Call your local American Red Cross to inquire about these courses and Pet First Aid Kits.

## **PUTTING YOUR PLANNING INTO ACTION**

At the first sign of an impending disaster, call ahead to confirm emergency shelter arrangements for you and your pets. Check to be sure your pet disaster supplies are ready to take at a moment's notice. Bring all pets into the house so that you won't have to search for them if you need to leave in a hurry. Make sure all dogs and cats are wearing collars and up-to-date identification tags. Attach the phone number and address of your temporary shelter; use temporary tags or put adhesive tape on the back of your pet's ID tag, adding information in an indelible pen.

When you return home, monitor your pet's behavior. The stress of an evacuation can cause even the friendliest animals to scratch or bite. Your home may be a different place when you return, so it is important to take precautions to ensure your pets' safety after the storm.

Don't allow pets to roam. Downed power lines, debris, and loose cables pose real dangers to pets.

Keep dogs on leashes until they reoriented to their surroundings. Familiar landmarks and scents may be gone, and they could become disoriented and get lost. Keep cats in kennels at first because they may escape should your house be damaged, i.e. broken windows, and doors, etc.

Be particularly careful when using candles and oil lamps. Never leave such lighting implements unattended around pets.

Do not allow pets to consume potentially contaminated food and water.

Your pets will likely be stressed for a time after the storm. Remain calm and try to keep as to their normal routine as possible. Speak to them in a calm, reassuring tone. Call your veterinarian if they have continued behavior problems.

It's not too late for you to create a disaster plan for your beloved pets and animals. Having an emergency shelter, a disaster supplies kit, and pet First Aid and CPR training can save an animal's life. Your pets are an important part of your family; take time now to ensure their safety during an emergency.