



WHEN DISASTER STRIKES:

Although we all like to think, "It will never happen to me," disasters can strike anyone at any time. Each year, two to three million people are affected by disasters. Many of these people own dogs and other pets and must provide care for these animals and themselves in the face of emergency.

Disasters can strike quickly and unannounced. We typically think of disasters as cataclysmic events such as floods, hurricanes, or earthquakes. However, individual family disasters are much more common. It is estimated that the United States suffers more than 150,000 household fires; 10,000 violent thunderstorms; 5,000 floods; 800 tornadoes; many forest fires and several hurricanes and earthquakes every year.

PLANNING FOR EMERGENCIES:

You likely can't prevent a disaster from happening, but you can reduce the impact of a disaster when it happens. A little planning goes a long way toward reducing injuries, death and suffering. This applies to both people and dogs. You and your dog will need shelter, water and food and other supplies should disaster occur. You should also consider the stress that is caused by disaster and how it affects both people and dogs. Mental health providers are a good resource when the disruption of the daily routine results in pain, fear and confusion.

You are ultimately responsible for the survival and well-being of your dog and other pets in your household, so you must be prepared to care for yourself first. You should have an emergency response plan and readily accessible kits with provisions for family members and pets. Being prepared allows first responders in your area to focus on others who may have more serious needs in the event of an emergency.

There are two main possibilities when an emergency strikes: evacuate or shelter in place. You will need to create a kit that allows you to get out of the home quickly and safely with your dog and the supplies you both might need. By adding a few additional items, your kit will also help you if you are required to shelter in place. You could also create separate kits for evacuation and shelter in place. Either way, make sure your kit is easy to locate and grab if emergency strikes, and easily portable in the event you need to leave your home.

Types of emergencies that would cause you to need to shelter in place include the following:

- Power outages which may be extended
- Winter storms
- Serious disease outbreak or pandemic
- Chemical spills which might require you to turn off heat or A/C and close all windows
- Tornado
- Nuclear or biological incidents
- Civil disorder or riot



When planning for sheltering in place, supply yourself with as much as possible in case the needs for sheltering are extended. Past recommendations were for 72 hours (3 days), but more recent suggestions recommend having supplies for 5 days or even longer. In the case of a severe winter storm or blizzard, help and evacuation may be delayed for more than 3 days. Keep your shelter in place supplies are kept in a storm shelter location (basement, closet or bathroom) so that if you get trapped by debris in a tornado for example, you can survive until help arrives.

Other emergencies might require evacuation. These include:

- Brush or structure fire
- Tornado, either before it hits or after damage has been done
- Flood or flash flood
- Hazardous material spill
- Extended power outage
- Contaminated water that persists
- Disease outbreak
- Terrorist attack
- Civil disturbance or riot

According to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy a very small percentage of dogs and cats separated from their owners during emergency situations are likely to be returned to them. Almost all animals can be microchipped or tattooed. This increases the likelihood that the pet is reunited with his owner much higher. In addition to these forms of permanent identification, dogs and cats should wear a collar with easy to read tags on them. A local number as well as a number for a national registry or a friend/relative at least 100 miles away should be on the tag. If local homes and phone lines are destroyed, that out of town number may be your pet's lifeline. It's likely that as technology evolves there will be other forms of permanent identification or collar tags that will prove even more effective in returning lost animals to their owners.

DEVELOP AN EMERGENCY PLAN:

An important first step in preparedness is the development of an emergency plan. Start by learning about the types of emergency situations that are more likely to occur in your area. Develop a general family disaster plan, as well as specific plans for your dog and other pets in the home.

The American Red Cross provides excellent courses for disaster plan development and has brochures that will help you and your family in developing and exercising your plan.

PRACTICE HOME EVACUATION:

Practice evacuation of your family and pets until you can evacuate within a few minutes. Everybody in the family should participate, including your pets. Decide on a place where your family will meet if you get separated. Decide who will take care of your pet and where he or she will stay during a crisis.



Arrange for pet care with neighbors, family and/or friends in case you are not able to return to an area during an emergency. Make sure they have keys to your house and leave information on where you will be, how you can be reached, where the animals are located, and how to care for your pets.

Consider whom you might phone outside of your area with regard to your family and pets. Often people cannot phone into a disaster zone, but it is possible to phone out. An out-of-state contact can help relay information and keep your family connected. Be sure to keep your cell phone charged and have external power banks on hand. These external power devices are readily available and inexpensive.

The best emergency plans involve many people and systems that can back one another up. Make sure you have current phone numbers for important contacts and create a list with these numbers to put in your emergency kit. Include numbers for the following:

- Neighbors
- Friends and family
- Your veterinarian, an alternative veterinarian and an emergency clinic
- Local animal control or humane shelter
- Local boarding facilities
- Area hotels and motels in your area that accept pets
- Animal Poison Control
- National registries like microchip or Home Again

An effective and proven method of ensuring help in a disaster is to establish a telephone tree. In an emergency an out-of-state or distant contact can be of great help in communicating important information.

PREPARING YOUR DOGS FOR EMERGENCIES:

Animals behave very differently when stressed or fearful. To reduce their stress and make them easier to handle, accustom your pets to sudden actions as would be needed in a disaster.

In some disasters, you may be at work or away from home when access to the area becomes restricted. In recent years, hurricanes and other disasters like wildfires some pets that were at home alone when the disaster occurred could not be caught by rescue workers and had to be abandoned. If you get separated from your dog, there are some things you can teach your dog to make his or her chances of recovery by a rescue worker much better. These can also help if your dog gets loose and lost at any time.

Being prepared for emergencies helps to keep both people and pets calm. Be sure your dog is well socialized from the beginning and knows basic manners. Your dog should be comfortable going to a stranger, accepting handling by strangers, being picked up and carried, being muzzled and being crated. Additionally, an emergency stop cue that will stop your dog in his tracks may save his life in many situations.



There are some things that any responsible pet parent should know and do to ensure the pet's safety in the event of an emergency.

- Learn what to expect if a particular emergency strikes.
- Have several different evacuation routes planned and mapped out. You may not be thinking clearly under stress or you may need to evacuate within minutes and having a route written down will save precious minutes.
- Know where you can go with your pets if you need to evacuate. Family, friends, hotels that accept pets and pet kennels that are out of the area are all possibilities. Always take your pet with you if you evacuate, you can find a place for them to stay once you are safe.
- Know how to identify your pet, especially if there are many others that look similar. Look for some describable, physical characteristic your pet has that sets him apart from all others that look similar.
- Keep several up to date photos of your pet in your emergency evacuation kit (along with current vaccination records and tattoo or microchip numbers)
- Send your pet's photos, vaccination records and identifying descriptions to a friend or relative that lives at least 100 miles away. If you are unable to look for your pet, this person should try to find your pet for you and be willing to care for your pet if you cannot.
- Review your evacuation plan often. In some cases, you may only have a few minutes when an emergency occurs.

Thorough preparation can give you considerable peace of mind that comes from knowing that you have done all that you can to prepare yourself, your family and your pets should emergency strike.

RESPONDING TO DISASTER:

To respond safely to a disaster, remain calm and assess the situation. Then do the following:

- Crate dog immediately. Otherwise, your pet may sense danger and become more difficult to catch and crate.
- If the dog has been exposed to chemicals, contact the sources of veterinary care listed in your emergency plan for information on how to handle it without harming yourself.
- Stay safe. Never attempt to rescue your dog if doing so would put your life or health or that of others in danger. You cannot help your dog or anyone else if you get injured. Additionally, if you require medical evacuation, it is very likely your dog will have to stay behind, and that could put your dog in further danger.
- Listen to your radio or television for instructions on what you should do and whether special arrangements have been made for people with pets. Follow these guidelines and incorporate them into the actions you take.