

Pets & Disasters

Introduction

Whether it's a large-scale natural catastrophe or an unforeseen emergency that causes you to leave your home temporarily, everyone's family can benefit from having a household evacuation plan in place before disaster strikes. Every disaster plan must include your pets! If you must evacuate your home, Take your pets with you if possible. But remember pets will usually not be allowed in public emergency shelters.*

Public health significance

For reasons of hygiene and to prevent injury to humans, many emergency shelters cannot accept pets.

Action to take

- If you evacuate your home, Pets most likely cannot survive on their own and if by some remote chance they do, you may not be able to find them when you return.
- Make sure identification tags are up to date and securely fastened to your pet's collar. If possible, attach the address and/or phone number of your evacuation site. If your pet gets lost, their tag is their ticket home. Make sure you have a current photo of your pet for identification purposes.
- Make sure you have a secure pet carrier, leash or harness for your pet so that if it panics, it can't escape.
- Take pet food, bottled water, medications, veterinary records, cat litter/pan, can opener, food dishes, first aid kit and other supplies with you in case they're not available later. While the sun is still shining, consider packing a "pet survival" kit which could be easily deployed if disaster hits.
- If you are unable to return to your home right away, you may need to board your pet. Most boarding kennels, veterinarians and animal shelters will need your pet's medical records to make sure all vaccinations are current. Include copies in your "pet survival" kit along with a photo of your pet.
- If it is impossible to take your pet with you to temporary shelter, contact friends, family, veterinarians, or boarding kennels to arrange for care. Make sure medical and feeding information, food, medicine and other supplies accompany your pet to his foster home. **NOTE:** Some animal shelters will provide temporary foster care for owned pets in times of disaster, but this should be considered only as a last resort.
- If you have no alternative but to leave your pet at home, there are some precautions you must take, but remember that leaving your pet at home alone can place your animal in great danger! Confine your pet to a safe area inside -- NEVER leave your pet chained outside! Place a notice outside in a visible area, advising what pets are in the house and where they are located. Provide a phone number where you or a contact can be reached as well as the name and number of your vet.

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After a disaster

In the first few days after the disaster, leash your pets when they go outside. Always maintain close contact. Familiar scents and landmarks may be altered and your pet may become confused and lost. Also, snakes and other dangerous animals may be brought into the area with flood areas. Downed power lines are also a hazard.

The behaviour of your pets may change after an emergency. Normally quiet and friendly pets may become aggressive or defensive. Watch animals closely. Leash dogs and place them in a fenced yard with access to shelter and water.

Trained guide dogs

In most cases, trained guide dogs for the blind, hearing impaired or handicapped will be allowed to stay in emergency shelters with their owners. Check with local emergency management officials for more information.

* Refer to Emergency Management Australia's "Pets in Emergencies Action Guide" (see Related Links below).

Acknowledgement:

Information for this document was sourced from The Humane Society of the United States 2100 L. Street, NW Washington, DC. 20037 Attn: Disaster Services Program

Related links:

- Emergency Management Australia Community Awareness Publications at website: www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/emaweb.nsf/Page/Publications
- Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) at website: www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- RSPCA Queensland at website: www.rspcaqld.org.au/