

Make Sure Your Pets Will Be Safe If Disaster Strikes

By Ursula Hoeft

Hurricane Sandy reminded us, once again, how at risk our pets are when disaster strikes, especially if evacuation is required. Many animals were displaced as a result of the hurricane; some may never be reunited with their owners. A horrible thought! We don't have hurricanes to worry about here – unless weather patterns are drastically altered by climate change, that is – but a tornado, a hazardous chemical spill, a fire, a terrorist act, are events that can occur in our area to create conditions that could make mass evacuation necessary. Every community has a disaster plan in place to provide shelter for the human population; unfortunately, generally speaking, shelters that are set up for humans will not take animals. We need to prepare our own disaster plan. Here are things to consider when doing so.

Make arrangements with relatives or friends to let you “bunk in” with them, with your pets. Make it a reciprocal arrangement. Develop a list of “pet friendly” hotels and motels, some close by and others further away in case the emergency involves a large area. Prepare a list of boarding facilities and animal hospitals where you could take your pets just in case it's impossible to make other arrangements. Keep this information in a handy place, where you'll be able to quickly locate it when it's needed.

If you don't already have them, obtain kennel crates or other types of carriers, one for each of your animals. It's much more likely that they will be accepted somewhere if you are able to keep them confined. Be sure that your pets can be identified, just in case they become separated from you. Tags on collars are good under normal conditions since they make it easy for anyone finding your pets to contact you. But you should also consider tattooing or microchip implanting, two more permanent types of identification. Discuss identification options with your veterinarian. Carry current photos of your pets in your wallet.

If possible, make arrangements for a neighbor to take your pets and meet you at a predetermined location in the event that you are not at home and emergency evacuation is ordered.

Put together a pet disaster kit. You'll need supplies for your animals if you have to evacuate. Place items in a sturdy, easy-to-carry container; review and update it periodically. Your pet disaster kit should include:

- Medical records and any medicines (place them in a waterproof container).
- First aid supplies.
- Emergency tags to be filled out later with the phone number and address of your temporary location.
- Extra collars (or harnesses) and leashes.
- Current photographs of your pets – indicate each animal's name.
- Food, potable water, bowls, litter pans for cats, a can opener. Don't forget to pack treats too!
- Toys, beds or cushions, but nothing too big or cumbersome.

- Pets' feeding schedules, description of medical conditions, instructions for administering medications, behavior problems/peculiarities, name and telephone number of your veterinarian, just in case you need to board your pets or foster them out.

If you know that a disaster is approaching:

- Call ahead to confirm emergency shelter arrangements.
- Check your pet disaster kit – replenish water.
- Bring all pets into the house. Make sure that dogs and cats are wearing collars with identifying information attached to them.
- Add information to emergency tags and attach them to collars.

Be aware that animals will react to what is going on around them. During emergency conditions, don't expect your pets to behave as they normally do. When stressed and afraid, even the most gentle and trustworthy animal may panic and hide, try to escape, bite or scratch. Be careful handling them and, if possible, don't let strangers approach them.

Having a plan in place will reduce the stress that you and your pets will experience during an emergency – and it may save their lives.

Additional guidelines for developing a personal disaster plan that includes pets can be found at <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/30/living/mnn-pets-emergency-plan/index.html>