Disaster Preparedness for your Pet

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Each year devastating disasters occur in our nation, which affect both humans and animals. These include earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, blizzards, chemical spills, and so on. Even disasters such as gas leaks and minor flooding can keep you from tending to your animals for extended periods of time. Being prepared for any type of disaster can help save the life of your pet.

Be ready

There are a number of things you can do to prepare for an emergency or disaster. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has developed these suggestions:

- **Talk to your veterinarian.** Set up an appointment to talk about planning for your animals during disasters.
- **Assemble an animal evacuation kit and first aid kit.**
- **Check all pet carriers or transport cages** to make sure they are in good condition, have no sharp edges, and have the following information indelibly printed on them: Your name; phone number; address; a description of your pet (distinguishing marks, age, sex, spayed, neutered, etc.); the name of your pet; microchip ID or tattoo ID, if any; pet insurance policy number; and the address and phone number where you or a contact person can be reached if you are not at home.
- **Have identification tags** (and license and rabies tags, if appropriate) for

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your animals. Identification should provide your name, home address, a phone number where you can be reached, and an out-of-area phone number of someone with whom you will be in contact during or soon after the disaster/evacuation. If possible, include your veterinarian's name, location, and phone number. Some of this information could be printed in indelible ink onto tape and attached to the back of the tag.

- **Assemble veterinary records.** Make photocopies of important veterinary documents to store in your animal's evacuation kit including vaccination records, medical history, important test results (FeLV, FIV, heartworm, Coggins, TB, other infectious diseases), medical conditions, and medications.
- **Assemble proof of ownership information.** Make copies of registration information, adoption papers, proofs of purchase, and microchip/tattoo or other identification information to store in the evacuation kit. List each of your animals and their species/breed, age, sex, color, and other distinguishing characteristics. Keep current photographs of your animals in the evacuation kit for identification purposes. Include yourself in some of the photos to help you reclaim your lost animals.
- **Develop a disaster plan** for each type of disaster that your area could be affected by, including a hazardous materials spill.
- **Develop an evacuation plan** for all of your animals.
- **Make a list of motels in your area** that will accept pets. Find out if motels with "no pet" policies will waive them in an emergency. Keep this in your animal evacuation kit.
- **Check with relatives and friends** not in your immediate area to determine if they will take your pets in the event of an emergency.
- **Make a list of boarding facilities**, veterinary clinics, animals shelters, or other establishments that would accept pets in an emergency.
- **Prearrange an evacuation site(s)** and emergency shelter arrangements for your family and your animals. Remember that Red Cross shelters do not allow animals.
- **Keep written directions to your home** near your telephone. This will help you tell emergency responders how to get to your home if you are in a state of panic and in need of rescue, or if a person unfamiliar with your area is the only person in your home during a disaster.
- **Keep a list of phone numbers** (including cell phone numbers) of friends or neighbors you may want to contact in the event of an emergency.

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- **Identify alternate sources of food and water.**
- **Keep all vehicles full of gas.**
- **Keep emergency cash on hand.**

If you have warning of a disaster

With some natural disasters, you may have some warning. If so,

- Call to confirm your emergency shelter arrangements (e.g., make motel reservations at a pet friendly motel).
- Contact all family members to confirm where you are going to meet.
- Bring any animals that are outdoors, inside. You may wish to confine cats to a small room (or a pet carrier) so they are easier to find. Do not try to hold onto an animal during a disaster (earthquake, tornado, etc.). Place the animal in a pet carrier, which will be much safer for you and the pet.
- Check your animal evacuation and first aid kits.
- Place any frozen or refrigerated pet food you may need into a cooler with ice packs.
- Attach any collars/harnesses with identification tags.
- If you must leave while a warning is in place, take your pets with you. You may not be able to return.
- Evacuate early, or emergency/rescue personnel may not allow you to bring your pets.

In case you are not at home

Preplace stickers on front and back house doors, barn doors, and pasture entrances to notify neighbors, firefighters, police, and other rescue personnel that animals are on your property and where to find your evacuation supplies. Provide a list near your evacuation supplies of the number, type, and location of your animals, noting favorite hiding spots, in order to save precious rescue time.

To facilitate a successful rescue, provide muzzles, handling gloves, catch nets, and animal restraints where rescue personnel can find them. Animals may become fractious when frightened.

Designate a willing neighbor to tend to your animals in the event that a disaster occurs when you are not at home, and meet you at a prearranged location. This person should have a key to your home, be familiar with your animals, and know your evacuation procedures and where your animal evacuation and first aid kits

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are kept. It is suggested that you provide a signed letter that releases your neighbor from responsibility, should one of your animals become injured, and a signed veterinary medical treatment authorization form.

If you must leave your pet at home during a disaster

Often, people have been told to leave their homes for a 'short time,' only to find that they cannot return for days or weeks. It is almost always best to take your animals with you. If you cannot:

- Confine your pets to a small room.
- Leave plenty of food and water.
- If possible, visit your pet(s) daily until you can return home.

In case you are in an accident

Develop contingency plans in case you are in an accident, become ill, or otherwise are unable to care for your pets.

You should have a card on you, in your vehicle, and on the refrigerator that has your name; phone number; address; a description of your pets (distinguishing marks, age, breed, sex, spayed, neutered, etc.); the names of your pets; microchip IDs or tattoo IDs, if any; pet insurance policy number; and the address and phone number where you or a contact person can be reached if you are not at home. Also, include information as to where your pets are (including favorite hiding spots), any medications they are taking, the name of your veterinarian, and who to contact regarding them. That contact person should know your vet, and know where you keep your pet's medications and where medical records are stored.

Conclusion

None of us like to think about being separated from our pets, but by careful planning, we can assure their safety and our peace-of-mind in the event such a situation would occur. Remember to be patient with your pet. It may take your pet up to several weeks to recover from the stress of a disaster/evacuation.

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