



Pet Emergency Preparedness

Elisabeth J. Giedt, D.V.M., M.B.A.

Director of Continuing Education, Extension and Community Engagement
Center for Veterinary Health Sciences
Oklahoma State University

When an emergency or natural disaster occurs, the likelihood you and your pets will survive a tornado, fire, earthquake or flood can depend on the emergency planning you do today. Owning pets adds responsibility for the safety of these animals. An emergency preparedness plan implemented properly can save lives. This fact sheet covers how to organize an emergency preparedness plan for animals. Keep a weather radio with battery backup to track storms and other emergency events.

Establish A Safe Place

In some emergency situations, one may need to leave home. In most circumstances, pets will need to go too. If you evacuate your home, **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR PETS BEHIND!** 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. Pet owners have lost their lives when they refuse to evacuate their homes in an emergency situation because they had nowhere to take their pets. Therefore, it is important to plan ahead.

The next step in organizing an emergency preparedness plan is to find a safe place to take your family and pets. Because of many states' health regulations, Red Cross disaster shelters cannot accept pets. The only animals allowed in Red Cross shelters are service animals that assist handicapped people. There are several other emergency shelter options for pets, such as staying in a hotel, boarding facility or the home of friends or family – be sure shelter choice(s) is outside the immediate living area. If hotels are preferred, keep a current list of hotels and motels that allow pets. Make a note of each hotel's policy, such as how many, size and type of pets. Keep a list of safe place(s) (hotels, boarding facilities or friends), along with phone numbers and pet policies in an emergency preparedness kit. Local animal shelters may be able to shelter pets in case of an emergency, but remember, these facilities are often overloaded with homeless animals and are not the best choice.

Prepare a back-up emergency plan in case you can't care for your animals yourself. Develop a buddy system with neighbors, friends and relatives to make sure someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so. In case an emergency strikes when no one is home, place a sign or sticker on the outside doors or entrances alerting emergency personnel or neighbors that animals are in the home or on the property. On this sign, include emergency contact name and phone number and location of emergency preparedness kit.

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets
are also available on our website at:
facts.okstate.edu

Post a list of the animals in the home and where the pets are located, near or in the emergency kit. Establish a person to serve as an emergency contact who lives close to the home and is out of the immediate living area. The emergency contact should be familiar with and have a list of pets and where they are located. Make sure identification tags are up to date. Pets should wear collars with identification tags (to include owner's name and phone) at all times. Identification by a microchip implanted by a veterinarian also is recommended. If possible, attach the address and/or phone number of your evacuation site. If your pet gets lost, his tag is his ticket home. Make sure you have a current photo of your pet for identification purposes.

Emergency Preparedness Kit

Assemble your emergency preparedness kit now – before an emergency occurs. The container should be easy to carry, water repellent and sturdy. Examples might be a duffle bag, large backpack or plastic container with handles. The emergency kit should contain the following:

- First aid kit (include a list of any medical conditions related to each pet and the name of pet's veterinarian and phone number – include vital medical records and supply of necessary medication in a waterproof container)
- List of pets or animals on the property, including species, typical location (in the case of house pets - favorite hiding places)
- Veterinary records
- Photos of pets, preferably with their owner
- Food, manual can opener, food dishes and bottles of water
- Strong leash and muzzle (because a pet can become agitated and bite a handler, even the owners, when frightened)
- Name and phone number of the emergency contact neighbor or friend who is willing to care for pets when owner is not home, and the emergency contact name out of the immediate area where pets can be taken in an evacuation emergency
- Have a pet carrier stored near the emergency preparedness kit
- Have cat litter/pan and shredded newspapers
- Trash bags for cleaning up after your pet
- Flashlight
- Pet bedding/blanket

Evacuation Plan or Emergency Procedure

There often is a warning prior to a disaster, and when prepared, one can act to protect family and pets. It is important to establish an emergency procedure or evacuation plan ahead of time. If a warning is issued hours prior to an impending disaster situation, there are several action steps to take:

- Check emergency preparedness kit for supplies.
- Bring the whole family and pets into the house so everyone is accounted for and ready to leave on short notice. Be sure pets are wearing collars with identification tags. Attach a temporary tag with the phone number of a safe place (shelter) and the phone number of a friend or relative outside the potential disaster area.
- Call ahead and make reservations or confirm safe place arrangements for family and pet(s).
- If family is not home when the warning is issued, contact an emergency contact person or neighbor (who has a key to the house) and ask them to transport pets to a prearranged safe meeting place or the out-of-town emergency contact person. It is important for the safety of an emergency contact and pets that this person knows how to locate pets, handle pets and access emergency preparedness kit.

Pets often react to change in their environment and stressful situations by trying to run away or hide. In the panic to escape, they may bite or scratch their handler, even if it is their owner. It is important to keep pets under control with a leash or in a carrier throughout the process of evacuation, including transporting in a car.

Emergency Preparedness for Other Types of Pets

It is important to have some type of identification for all pets, even birds, pocket pets (small mammals) and reptiles. Photos can be used as long as they are kept current. As with dogs and cats, keep pictures and medical records in an emergency preparedness kit. Evacuate a bird either in a travel carrier or cage. Covering the cage while transporting will minimize stress and keep the bird warm in cold weather. If traveling in warm weather, use a plant mister to keep the bird cool. Once reaching the safe place or shelter, keep birds in a quiet place and always in the cage. Pocket pets, such as guinea pigs, hamsters and ferrets should be transported in covered and well-secured cages or carriers to ease stress. Small reptiles can be transported in a small carrier, pillowcase or cloth sack. When reaching the shelter, the reptile should be moved immediately to a secure enclosure or cage. Take water and appropriate food for birds, small mammals or reptiles. These pets also may require other specialized equipment if the pet will be at the shelter for some time; for example, a heating pad for reptiles or bedding materials for pocket pets.

Planning for Emergency Saves Lives

Pets are part of the family and rely on their owners for their care and safety. A family emergency plan should include pets. If a family has a plan and prepares for emergencies, they will minimize the effects of a disaster. Remember, if evacuating a home, take the pets. Their chances for survival are better if they are taken to a shelter that accepts pets or to a prearranged safe place.

For more information, visit the “Caring for Animals” page at www.ready.gov/animals. This has a wealth of information on disaster planning and preparedness. In particular, there is the client brochure “Information for Pet Owners,” for which the AVMA was a production consultant.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Higher Education Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal and state laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, genetic information, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, or status as a veteran, in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This provision includes, but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. The Director of Equal Opportunity, 408 Whitehurst, OSU, Stillwater, OK 74078-1035; Phone 405-744-5371; email: eeo@okstate.edu has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies; Director of Equal Opportunity, Any person (student, faculty, or staff) who believes that discriminatory practices have been engaged in based on gender may discuss his or her concerns and file informal or formal complaints of possible violations of Title IX with OSU's Title IX Coordinator 405-744-9154.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President for Agricultural Programs and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. Revised 0518 GH.