

6 Steps to Save Your Pet's Life in a Disaster

Are you prepared to protect your pet in the event of a man-made or natural disaster? Simple preparatory steps taken now can be the difference between life and death if emergency strikes.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Rule number one in an emergency: if you're evacuating your home, take your pets with you
- Prepare an emergency pet kit ahead of time and keep a list of pet-friendly shelters and hotels
- Keep your pet's identification tags and/or microchip current and develop a plan with neighbors to assist in rescuing each other's pets if necessary
- Your kit should contain a supply of pet food, a pet safety harness, bottled water, medications, first-aid supplies, proof of ownership and recent medical records
- Also, be sure you're familiar with your pets' hiding spots so you can reach them quickly if bad weather is approaching

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published March 10, 2016.

If disaster strikes, do you have a plan in place to keep your pets safe? About 35% of cat and dog owners do not, according to a survey commissioned by The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).¹

Unfortunately, if you wait until an emergency occurs to think about a plan, it's probably going to be too late. Taking action now to put a simple plan in place can make the difference between life and death for your pets. Tim Rickey, senior director of ASPCA Field Investigations and Response, explained:²

"It doesn't matter where you live, anyone can be hit with a natural or man-made disaster ... When you're in the moment, it can be very stressful for you and your pets ..."

"Having a plan in place ahead of time can save you precious time and energy, so you can focus on quickly getting you and your pets to safety."

6 Disaster Preparedness Tips

In the event of emergency, having the following plans in place will be priceless.

1. **Prepare a pet emergency kit** — Pack a to-go emergency kit in a waterproof container. Let all members of your family know where your kit is stored and evaluate it every year to replace expired items.

At the very least, your kit should contain a supply of pet food, a pet safety harness, bottled water, medications, first-aid supplies, proof of ownership and recent medical records. The ASPCA also recommends including the following items:³

- Pet first-aid kit
- Three to seven days' worth of canned (pop-top) or dry food (be sure to rotate every two months)
- Disposable litter trays (aluminum roasting pans are perfect)
- Litter or paper toweling
- Liquid dish soap and disinfectant
- Disposable garbage bags for clean-up
- Pet feeding dishes
- Extra collar or harness as well as an extra leash
- Photocopies (or a thumb drive) of medical records and a waterproof container with a two-week supply of any medicine your pet requires
- Bottled water, at least seven days' worth for each person and pet
- A traveling bag, crate or sturdy carrier, ideally one for each pet
- Flashlight
- Blanket (for scooping up a fearful pet)
- Recent photos of your pets (in case you are separated and need to make "Lost" posters)
- Especially for cats: Pillowcase or EvackSack, toys, scoopable litter
- Especially for dogs: Extra leash, toys and chew toys, a week's worth of cage liner

2. **Update your pet's identification** — Does your pet have a microchip? If so, be sure the information connected to it (including your address and phone number) is current. Also, be sure the information on your pet's collar is accurate so you can be located in the event you become separated from your pet.

Consider adding the name and phone number of a family member or friend who doesn't live in your immediate area. If you're not reachable, there'll be someone at the other number who will be.

3. **Know where you'll go** — Rule number one is this: if you're evacuating your home, don't leave your pets behind. They likely won't be able to survive without you, or they may become lost and may not be there when you return.

If you'll be evacuating to a shelter, not all of them allow animals, so seek out animal-friendly public shelters, or speak with friends or family outside of your immediate area who you and your pets could stay with for a short time if necessary.

It's also a good idea to keep a list of pet-friendly hotels in case you can't find a shelter that accepts animals. You can also talk with animal shelters and veterinarians to find out whether they will board pets in emergency situations.

4. **Have a back-up plan that involves your pet-friendly neighbors** — In the event you can't get back to your home, who will evacuate your pets? Speak with nearby friends and neighbors and develop a strategy to look out for each other's pets in case one of you isn't home at the time of emergency. That person will need a key or other means of access to your home, an idea of where to find your pet once inside, and he or she

should also be comfortable handling your animal.

Agree ahead of time on a location where you can meet to retrieve your pet or arrange for the person to provide temporary shelter.

5. **Use a rescue alert sticker** — A rescue alert sticker, placed on a prominent door or window, can be used to alert rescue workers to the number and type of pets inside. Include your pet's name and your phone number so you can be easily contacted. If you evacuate your home with your pets, write "evacuated" on the rescue sticker so emergency responders know everyone is accounted for, including your pets.
6. **Keep a photo of your pet handy** — A picture is worth a thousand words, so if your pet gets lost a photo can be invaluable to bringing her home. Be sure the photo is current (within the last year at least) and keep a copy in your wallet or purse as well as in your emergency kit.

Protect Your Pets in a Tornado, Hurricane, Flood or Fire

The type of emergency will dictate how best to protect your family, including your pets. PetMD compiled important tips you can use in each of the following disaster scenarios.⁴

- **Tornado** — Designate a safe location in your home as your "tornado shelter." This should be a windowless room nearest to ground level (or below ground level). Keep a pet emergency kit and crates in the designated area for each of your pets. Practice retreating to the area regularly so everyone is used to the routine.

Also, be sure you're familiar with your pets' hiding spots so you can reach them quickly if bad weather is approaching. If you can evacuate before the storm, take your pets with you. If not, retreat to your safe area and put your pets in their crates. If possible, place the crates under heavy furniture for added safety.

If you have farm animals and live in an area with tornados, you should typically let them out of the barn for their best chance of survival. As Bonnie Smith, a large animal veterinarian, told TuftsNow:⁵

"Whenever there's going to be a chance of high winds and flying debris, let your animals out ... Your instinct is to keep them inside and protected. But in the barn, they're susceptible to anything blowing around because they are stuck in a stall.

If they're outside, they can get themselves into the lowest spot and out of the wind. The animals know their pastures way better than we do because their whole life depends upon it."

After the tornado has passed, keep your pets secured and stay away from water (which may be contaminated or have live downed power lines in it) and debris.

- **Hurricane** — Designate a safe location to act as your hurricane shelter. A windowless room nearest to ground floor is best. As with tornados, keep a crate in the area for each of your pets and get in the habit of retreating to your shelter spot so you can move there quickly in an emergency. Keep your pet emergency kit in the safe area as well.

If you can evacuate before the storm, take your pets with you. If not, retreat to your safe area and put your pets in their crates. If possible, place the crates under heavy furniture for added safety. After the hurricane, keep your pets secured (dogs on a leash and cats in a carrier) and stay away from water and debris.

- **Flood** — If you live in an area prone to flooding, be sure you know where your pets hide so you can find them quickly. Practice regular "flood drills" by moving to the upper floor or attic of your home. If the flooding is severe, you should plan to move onto your roof until help arrives.

Keep your pets on a leash or in crates so they are safely contained. After a flood, stay inside until the water recedes and stay away from debris, flood waters and downed power lines.

- **Fire** — In the event of a fire, if you aren't able to bring your pets with you (if your cat is hiding, for example), leave the doors of your home open so your pets have a chance to find their way out. Then call your pet's name. Hopefully he will hear your voice and make his way out to you.

Be persistent and loud — and don't give up. It may take time for your pet to work up the courage to come to your voice. If you live in an area with wildfires, practice regular drills to evacuate, and plan to bring your pet with you on a leash or in their crate or carrier. After a wildfire, it may be unsafe for pets to roam outside, as structures may have become unstable and wildlife may have been pushed into residential areas.

Your Pet May Need Extra TLC After a Disaster

Emergencies shake up your pets just as they do the rest of the family. In severe cases, animals may be traumatized by disasters, leading to changes in personality and behavior or even a type of post-traumatic stress disorder. You'll want to keep a close eye on your pets and be patient as you all adjust to the circumstances. As your routine returns to normal, your pet likely will too, but if you notice behavioral changes that don't resolve, talk to your veterinarian.

For more information, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has produced an excellent tool for detailed planning for both large and small animals in the event of a disaster. Download the AVMA's "Saving the Whole Family" planning booklet to protect your pets now.

Sources and References

^{1, 2} [ASPCA.org August 30, 2011](#)

³ [ASPCA.org Disaster Preparedness](#)

⁴ [PetMD](#)

⁵ [TuftsNow November 28, 2011](#)
