

Disaster Preparation



Disasters come in all shapes and sizes, and they can strike at any time. Whether it's debris from a winter storm blocking access to your home or the next big earthquake, follow these tips to prepare and protect your family and pets. After all, your pet's best chance for safety in a disaster is you.

Before A Disaster Strikes

Here's a list of things you can do now, before any type of disaster affects you or your pets. A little preparation and planning will greatly reduce stress—both yours and your pets'—and ensure their safe return should they be separated from you.

Identification

Make sure all animals have collars with identification tags. Cats should have breakaway collars. Identification tags should include a cell number, in case you are not reachable at home. Ideally, your pets should also have a microchip in case their collars come off. Remember to keep your contact information for the microchip current, and include a cell number.

Pet First Aid

Consider taking a pet first aid class. In the event of a disaster, emergency services and personnel may be overwhelmed—you may be your pet's best chance of rescue or medical care.

Practice!

If your dog doesn't come when called, or if your cat resists going into her carrier, they may need some training too. Familiarize your pets with an evacuation scenario by trying some practice drills—can you get everybody out of the house in less than five minutes?

Household Safety

You can protect your pets by making sure your house isn't prone to hazardous conditions during a disaster. Think about your pets' favorite hangouts or where they hide when they are frightened. Are heavy items like bookcases secured in place? Are hazardous chemicals secured somewhere where they won't fall or spill? Are aquariums secured?

Pet Disaster Kit

You should have a disaster kit with supplies for each animal and it should be stored with your own disaster supplies. The kit should be easy to carry or load in the car, and it should be waterproof. A plastic storage tub or a duffle bag works well.

- Food for one week (two weeks is better) - Include all food and treats in your pet's everyday diet. Consider single-serving wet food cans, and remember the can opener! A measuring cup and a spoon are useful for serving food.

- Water for one week (two weeks is better)
- Non-spill food and water bowls
- Medications for two weeks (include a small ice chest and/or ice packs for refrigerated medications)
- Litter pans, litter, and scoop
- Cleaning supplies such as plastic bags for waste disposal, liquid soap, disinfectant, paper towels, and garbage bags
- A fact sheet – Place in a plastic bag for each pet, in case you need to leave your pets with friends or at a shelter. Fact sheets should include a recent photo of you with your pet, a description of your pet (breed, weight, color, and sex), your contact information, your vet's contact information, feeding and medication instructions, copies of vaccination records, and microchip number. A pre-signed veterinary medical treatment authorization is optional.
- Pre-made "Lost" poster for each pet – Include your cell number and don't forget tape for hanging the posters.
- Leashes and extra collars or harnesses with identification tags
- Carrier for each pet, for transportation and temporary housing - each animal should have their own carrier—even friendly animals may fight if stressed. Carriers should be big enough for the animal to stand, lie down, and turn around. Cat carriers should have room for a small litter pan.
- Blankets or towels for bedding
- Grooming tools and toys
- Muzzle - useful if your dog is aggressive or injured
- Pet first aid kit - basic supplies include:
 - Pet first aid book
 - Bandage scissors
 - Tweezers
 - Cotton swabs
 - Antibiotic ointment
 - Sterile bandages and vet wrap
 - Cold packs (for swelling or heat exhaustion)
 - Sterile saline solution (for flushing wounds and eyes)
- Radio and flashlight with batteries
- Cash

Replace the food, water, and medicines in your disaster kit every six months.

Buddy System

There's no guarantee that you will be at home, or able to get home, when disaster strikes. A buddy system provides a backup plan. Find a trusted friend or neighbor, ideally someone who is typically at home during the hours that you are not. Give them a key to your house, familiarize them with your pets and any medical issues, and make sure they know where to find your disaster kit. If your neighborhood is evacuated while you aren't at home, your buddy can make sure your animals are evacuated safely.

Know Where to Go

If you must evacuate your home, think about where to take your animals. **Most people shelters will not take pets.** The best option for your animals is for them to stay with a friend or family member outside the disaster area. Decide in advance who will take your animals. Another option is a pet-friendly hotel—make a list of hotels in your area that accept pets.

The [PetsWelcome website](#) provides pet-friendly hotel listings. Another resource is the [AAA's "Traveling with Your Pet" guide](#).

Keep in mind that boarding kennels, veterinary clinics, and animal shelters are also temporary housing options. However, it's likely these facilities will be full in the event of a disaster.

Rescue Alert Stickers

It's good practice to have rescue alert stickers prominently displayed on your house. This will let fire or rescue workers know how many animals are in the house if they must enter your home when you are not there.

During a Disaster

At the **first sign** of a disaster, make sure all your pets are confined inside the house so you can catch them quickly. Also make sure every animal is wearing identification and that your pet disaster kit is within easy reach.

If you must evacuate your home, take your pets with you! Animals left behind may be lost, injured, or killed during a disaster. Even if you only expect to be gone a few hours, conditions could change and your animals may be left without care for days. Don't wait until the last minute to evacuate with your animals—you have a better chance of keeping them with you in an evacuation if you leave early.



You may be asked to **shelter at home** during some disasters, like a flu epidemic or a chemical spill. Make sure your pet disaster kit is handy so you can care for your animals without leaving the house. You'll want to have a battery-operated radio on hand so you can hear updates and learn when it's safe to leave your home.

Lost and Found Animals

If your pets get lost in a disaster, visit your local shelters frequently, and provide them with a detailed description and photo of your pet. Hang your "Lost" posters over a wide area. Be patient—a lost and frightened animal may stay hidden for days.

If you find animals that appear to be lost, notify your local animal shelter.

After a Disaster

Your animals may not behave like their usual selves after the disaster. Keep them confined indoors until they get back to normal—a frightened animal is more likely to run away. Also make sure that the disaster didn't create any hazards for your animals, like broken glass and spilled household chemicals.

For More Information

The American Veterinary Medical Association provides a [detailed guide to disaster preparedness for all kinds of animals](#).