

Disaster Preparedness

Recent natural disasters in California such as floods, fires and earthquakes are painful reminders that we live in an ever changing environment and that we must be prepared for the sudden loss of shelter, food, power, fresh water, and communications systems. Much has been said and written about the need to be prepared and how to protect home and family in the event of a major natural disaster. All too often one important family member is overlooked- the family pet. As with any other disaster planning, care for the family dog, cat, bird, hamster, or snake during a disaster should be thought out well ahead of time. When developing a disaster plan for your pet, you should ask yourself the following questions: What supplies will my pet need to survive for 3-5 days? What will I do with my pet in the actual event of a major disaster? What will I do if my pet becomes lost? Are there any organizations that can help before, during and after a disaster? By addressing these questions ahead of time you will see how relatively easy it is to be prepared for the next major flood, fire or earthquake.

There are a number of things a pet owner can do, in advance, that will help assure their pet's comfort or even survival during a disaster. With a little time and effort a Pet Disaster Kit can be made that will make a very confusing and stressful time more tolerable for you and your pet. Your Pet disaster Kit should include the following:

- Food and water for 3-5 days
- Food and water bowls
- Can opener
- Sturdy leashes, collars and/or travel kennel
- A copy of current medical records
- Veterinarian's name, address and phone number
- Any medications your pet receives regularly
- A current photograph of your pet (in case he or she is lost)
- Pet bedding and toys
- A litter pan and litter material(cats).

Store these items inside a waterproof container in an accessible location in your home. Some people who frequently travel by car with their pet may choose to set up a Pet Disaster kit to be stored in their car as well.

If a disaster should occur and you need to evacuate your home, plan on evacuating your pet as well. Leaving your pet behind, even if you have left provisions, is risky. When evacuating your home, never allow your pet to run unrestrained. Always keep your pet securely leashed or in a dependable travel kennel. During times of disaster, pets can be very stressed and not behave or mind as well as they would during calmer times. If you are evacuating to a temporary Red Cross shelter, please remember, for public health and safety reasons, Red Cross shelters *do not* accept pets. In some cases the Red Cross will set up separate pet shelters for people to leave their pets under the care of volunteers, but you should not count on this provision. Plan ahead by calling local kennels, veterinary hospitals and animal shelters to see if they would be able and willing to provide emergency shelter for your pet in the event of a disaster. Check with family

and friends living outside your immediate area to see if they could house your pet for a short time.

Losing a family pet during a disaster is a tragic but unfortunately common event. The single most important step that you can take to avoid this tragedy is to be sure your pet is well identified. Your pet should always wear identification tags on a durable, well fitting collar. In addition, I recommend that all of my patients have microchip identification.

With this system a small microchip is permanently inserted under the skin of the upper shoulder by a simple injection. This procedure is essentially painless – no more uncomfortable than routine vaccination injections. Once in place, the microchip can be read by a handheld scanner to reveal a nine-digit number that is registered to the pet's owner. This system provides a permanent and reliable method of identification and most animal control services and veterinarians have scanners to check lost pets. Your veterinarian or local animal shelter can assist you with getting your pet microchipped.

If you should lose your pet, visit the local animal shelters every one to two days. Don't give up too early; remember some pets may not reach the shelter for many days, or even weeks! Posting flyers in the area and running notices in the Vallejo Times Herald can be helpful as well. Additionally, enlist the help of neighbors and friends to keep and eye out for your special family member.

Many organizations are available and willing to help you and your pet before, during, and after a natural disaster. The Humane Society of the United States, in cooperation with the American Red Cross has produced some excellent information on pets and disasters.

The address for the Humane Society of the United States is:
2100 "L" St. NW, Washington D.C. 20037

At the state level, the California Veterinary Medical Association has developed a Disaster Response Program. Each county in the state has a veterinary coordinator who organizes a network of volunteer veterinarians and nurses, veterinary hospitals, kennels, and other animal related services. These people work closely with local emergency personnel to coordinate care and shelter for animals affected by a disaster. For information on this program and on disaster preparation for your pets, contact the CVMA at 1-800-655-2862.

No one can predict when or where a natural disaster may strike next. If our past experience tells us anything, it is that those who are prepared fare much better than those who are not. We owe it to ourselves and our families (pets included!) to be prepared.