



# Pet Emergency Preparedness

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In Oklahoma, there are tornadoes, fires, and floods that cause a tremendous amount of harm. The best way to protect oneself and family is to plan for emergencies. 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.

## Establish A Safe Place

In some emergency situations, one may have to leave the home. In most circumstances, pets will need to go too. Pets left behind in disaster situations can be injured or lost. 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. This includes proper identification, since even with the best of plans pets can be lost. 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 is also recommended.

The next step in organizing an emergency preparedness plan is to find a safe place to take the 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 each place's phone number and pet policies in an emergency preparedness kit. Local animal shelters may be able to shelter pets in the case of an emergency, but remember these facilities are often overloaded with homeless animals and not the best choice.

For an emergency that strikes when one is not 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. 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 that lives close to the home and is out of the immediate living area. The emergency contacts should be familiar with and have a list of pets and where they are located.

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets are also available on our website at: <http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

## Emergency Preparedness Kit

The emergency preparedness kit should be assembled 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 property, including species, typical location (in the case of house pets - favorite hiding places)
- Photos of pets
- Food 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 that 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

## Evacuation Plan or Emergency Procedure

There is often 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 Pets**

It is important to have some type of identification of 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 these pictures along with 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 may also 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 typically 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 to 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 on how to protect and care for pets and livestock, contact the American Veterinary Medical Association at [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org), OSU CVM Office of Outreach, or a local veterinarian.