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Emergency Preparedness: How to Keep Your Pets Safe This Hurricane Season



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Published by Insite Editorial Staff at July 1, 2019

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By Paige Brazil





Pets are a part of the family, so when extreme weather hits, it's just as important to include your pet in your emergency plans. With hurricane season in full effect, it is important that you, as a pet owner, are fully equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skill set to help prepare your pet for a natural disaster.

Wesley T. Bissett, DVM, Ph.D., director of the Veterinary Emergency Team at Texas A&M University, says the specific steps owners should take to prepare their pets for natural disasters fall into two categories. The first is to make sure your pets are up-to-date on an appropriate wellness program.

"A good place to start is considering vaccines that boarding facilities require," Bissett says. "The reality is that disaster settings typically result in animals being provided emergency shelter. This can be a stressful time for pets as emergency shelters are often set up in facilities that were not designed specifically for the purpose of sheltering animals."

Emergency shelters also result in animals being congregated together at the shelter. Pets are exposed to animals they have never "met" before. Disaster settings often result in limited information on pets being provided emergency shelter, so the vaccination status may not be known. Good vaccination protocols help prevent illnesses resulting from exposure, explains Bissett.

The other part to this, Bissett says, is keeping your pets healthy by making sure chronic conditions are well regulated and outside parasites are addressed immediately.

"If your pet has a chronic condition that requires daily maintenance, it is a good idea to have a case summary from your local veterinarian," says Bissett. "Keeping these types of records and making them part of your disaster planning provides valuable information on current problems and therapeutic plans to the receiving shelter and helps maintain consistency of care."

The third facet of this category is to consider having your pet microchipped and keeping all information up to date in the microchip registry.

"We have had several experiences where people and their pets were successfully reunited due to a microchip and current registration," Bissett says. "We have also seen numerous cases where an animal was microchipped but the owner's information was never registered."

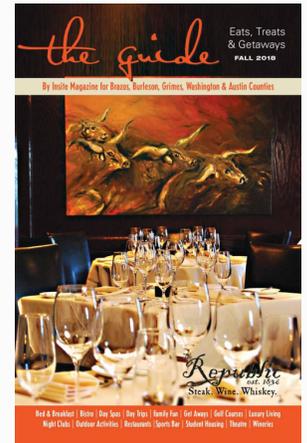
The second category, explains Bissett, is proper emergency planning. Creating a well-thought-out disaster plan for your pet is extremely helpful.

"Additional steps that will be helpful in making these types of scenarios work are making sure that you have appropriate-sized kennels, that your animals are either crate-trained or house-broken, and that external parasites are not a problem. It is also a good idea to identify pet-friendly hotels," says Bissett. "The groundwork of identifying these types of evacuation destinations are worthwhile as this will lessen the strain that is placed on receiving jurisdictions and keep your pet out of community shelters that may include numerous animals."

If you do not have the resources or ability to evacuate your area pre-incident, it is important to have the following on-hand:



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- A kennel or crate that provides a and secure space for your pet
- Copy of your pet's medical records
- Preventive medications (heartworm and external parasite prevention)
- Two weeks' worth of medications if your pet is currently being treated
- Three to seven days' worth of food and water
- Photos of you with your pets. If your pet has what you consider unique markings or scars, make sure you have good photos of those markings
- Cleaning supplies, waste bags, litter, etc.

Your pet could experience a wide range of behavioral changes during a time of disaster, Bissett says. These changes may range from withdrawal to aggression and anywhere in between, which is understandable due to the abrupt change in environment. Your pet may also be subject to dietary changes, animals they have never met before, and unfamiliar people.

"Advance planning is the key to navigating the post-incident landscape with your pet," says Bissett. "The time you invest will be well-spent."



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