

National Preparedness Month - September 2007

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL:

Emergency Preparedness for Owners of Pets and Service Animals

By John Cavanagh and Anne Malia

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a service animal as “any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability.” Many people do not realize that these animals are not merely pets—they are living, intelligent, assistive tools. Their duties include:

- guiding people who are blind
- alerting people who are deaf or hearing impaired to doorbells, fire alarms or a infant’s cry
- pulling wheelchairs for people with mobility impairments
- protecting a person who has seizures
- performing a therapeutic function for persons with mental challenges

Most service animals are dogs, but some horses have been trained to guide people who are blind, and a small number of monkeys assist people with quadriplegia. Unlike pets, service animals and their owners may enter a wide range of public accommodations, including shops, restaurants, museums, and transportation systems. The service animal’s owner is responsible for its behavior and for supplying any food, water, or any medication it may need, particularly during a disaster. In times of disaster, a service animal is permitted in a shelter, clinic, or any other facility the situation requires, such as a Federal Recovery Center. During a disaster, a service animal could make the difference between life and death for its owner; therefore the safety of these creatures must be taken into account when considering emergency preparedness.

Protecting Animals in the Event of a Fire

Home fires are the most common as well as the most deadly disaster faced by Americans. Each year, people perish when they re-enter a burning house to save a pet. Do NOT take this brave but foolhardy action. Leave rescues to the firefighters—they are the experts! Your opportunity to be a hero comes through developing a solid emergency plan for your animal's safety. The National Organization on Disability makes the following recommendations:

- Purchase stickers for doors and windows indicating the number, type, and probable location of your animals. Update the stickers as your animal population changes.
- If possible, confine animals to a particular room each time you leave home. That way you will know where they are and may be able to direct firefighters if a fire starts in your absence.
- If you can't keep the animals in one place, remember where they usually go to sleep or hide. That is where they are likely to be in case of fire.
- Make sure your animals wear unbreakable collars with current license and vaccination tags.
- Place muzzles, handling gloves, catch nets, and animal restraints where firefighters can easily find them.
- Keep animal health and ownership records (including a photo of you with your animal) in your "go kit", so you can quickly grab them upon exiting. Keep a copy of the records in a safe location away from your home.

In Case of Evacuation:

If you are forced to evacuate your home, *do not leave your animals behind!* They probably will not survive on their own; and even if they do, you may not be able to find them when you return. Prepare for an evacuation by packing an "animal survival kit" which could be easily deployed if a disaster strikes. This kit should include the following supplies:

- pet food
- dishes

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- can opener
- bottled water
- medication
- veterinary records
- pet first-aid guidebook
- blanket
- long leash

Select evacuation sites in advance. If you board your animals, make certain that the kennel or veterinary clinic is not also in the path of the immediate hazard. If you will be staying with friends or relatives, make sure that they know you are bringing animals. If you do not have a car, arrange evacuation assistance for family and pets with at least two different individuals. If you absolutely cannot bring animals with you, leave them inside with an adequate supply of food and water for several days. Do not tie them up outside.

During an Emergency

If you are not evacuating, bring your pets inside immediately at the onset of an emergency. It is no secret that animals have keen instincts concerning severe weather changes. They will often hide in isolation if they are scared. Bringing them inside early can prevent them from running away. Never leave an animal outside or tied up during a storm. During an emergency, have newspapers available for sanitary purposes. Feed your animals moist or canned food so that they will need less drinking water. Separate dogs and cats; regardless of whether your dogs and cats normally get along, the anxiety of an emergency situation can cause pets to act irrationally. Keep smaller pets away from cats and dogs.

After the Disaster

For the first few days after the disaster, keep your animals on a leash when they go outside. Place them in a fenced yard with access to shelter and water. Always maintain close contact with them. Following a disaster, familiar scents and

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landmarks may be altered and your pet may become confused and lost. Also, a flood can bring snakes and other dangerous animals into the area. Downed power lines are also a hazard to be aware of. Be patient with your pets after a disaster. Try to get them back into their normal routines as soon as possible. Remember that the behavior of your animals may change after an disaster. Pets that normally are quiet and friendly may become aggressive or defensive. Watch animals closely: If behavioral problems persist, or if your pet seems to be having any health problems, talk to your veterinarian.

Resource 23 – Preparedness for Pets and Service Animals:

Disaster Preparedness for Pets

http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center/resources/disaster_preparedness_for_pets.html

The Humane Society of the United States posts a useful webpage regarding emergency preparedness for animals. The site includes resources, links, and articles about evacuations and everyday precautions. Also included is a disaster supply checklist for pets.

TOMORROW: Emergency Preparedness for the Elderly

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Article inquiries welcome. On request, we can provide feature-length articles tailored to your audience and requirements. **Please contact John Cavanagh at Bridge Multimedia: (212) 213-3740 or jcavanagh@bridgemediamedia.com.**