



# Helping Four-Legged Friends Survive the Storm

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This information is intended to accompany the video “Helping Four-Legged Friends Survive the Storm,” which can be viewed on-line [<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/videos/v001401-v001500/v001438.html>] at the National Agricultural Safety Database Web site, and is available for purchase from the University of Florida IFAS Extension Bookstore [<http://www.ifasbooks.ufl.edu/merchant2/>].

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# Introduction

Preparedness is crucial because there are no schedules for disasters. They can happen at any time — and often with little warning — so emergency crews, health practitioners and community leaders must be ready to respond at a moment's notice. Animals are affected by disasters and emergencies, just like people. They can sense danger and become anxious, and they are just as vulnerable to strong winds, rising waters, or flying debris as humans.

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences developed the video "Helping Four-Legged Friends Survive the Storm" to help everyone involved in disaster planning and response prepare effectively to meet the challenges that animals in disasters pose.

We encourage you to use this manual to make notes and write out ideas that apply to your community and area. Beyond that, we suggest that you share this material with other officials, citizens, and employees so that they can be more active in disaster preparations and can indeed triumph over tragedy.

## Readiness:

# Recognizing Planning's Importance

How important are our pets to us? One measure is provided by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA), which estimated that Americans spent \$38.4 billion on their pets in 2006. This figure includes:

- \$15.2 billion for food
- \$9.3 billion for supplies and over-the-counter medications
- \$9.4 billion for veterinarian care
- \$1.8 billion for live animal purchases
- \$2.7 billion for other services

Obviously, our pets are very important to us. Americans have an even greater investment in animals raised for food and other products, yet, many animal owners have no plan for what to do during a disaster.

Questions about what to do with pets in emergencies hit home in the summer of 1999, when wildfires struck throughout Florida. Some pets died because owners were unable to rescue them.

Dealing with pets also was a challenge following Hurricane Andrew, which left many pets homeless. More recently, Hurricane Katrina forced many people either to abandon their pets or face the dangers of the hurricane at home. (In response to the many challenges created by people and their pets in that situation, Congress passed legislation that requires every jurisdiction in the United States to have a plan for emergency sheltering that includes pets. However, the first line of defense is always personal preparedness. The plans you make for you and your pet will be more specific and appropriate to your needs.)

We have roughly a million population out there in temporary homes, their homes are destroyed now. Six or seven months before they are able to rebuild. Where do they put their pets? Who takes care of them? Who feeds them? Who waters them? That's the big issue.

— Joe Kight, Florida Division of Animal Industry,  
speaking about the impact of Hurricane Andrew

## Readiness:

# Coming to the Rescue

Many different organizations and agencies are involved in helping animals after any disaster. They can include the Humane Society, local groups of volunteers, and state agricultural and consumer services agencies. In recent years, the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART) has played an increasingly important role with animals in disasters.

Florida's 1998 wildfires presented challenges for all the agencies involved:

We had thousands of cows out roaming on the highway. We had volunteer cattlemen that came up from other parts of the state on horseback helping us to round up the cattle, and temporary fencing that was put up.

— Martha Roberts, Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Pets also were given special care.

We had dogs, cats, personal pets that were just abandoned or terrified and ran off. They were located. They were provided with proper care and feeding and were then hopefully reunited with their owners.

— Martha Roberts

## Readiness:

# Taking Responsibility

You can't always leave it to the experts to take care of your pets or livestock during emergencies. It's the owner's responsibility to make critical decisions about their animals' welfare.

[Pet owners] will have the best solutions. They'll have the most versatile solutions, and they'll be the people who are most capable of implementing those solutions. So I really recommend that everybody seek their own personal solution to this.

— Sebastian Heath, veterinarian and author of  
“Animal Management in Disasters”

## Readiness:

# Deciding on Pet Evacuation

One of the first decisions that you need to make in disaster planning is whether to take your animals with you or leave them behind.

Many factors come into play when making this choice. They include:

- Whether you're dealing with pets or livestock
- Where you're going
- How many animals you're transporting

A person with 25 or 30 horses is not going to be able to move those animals, but a person with one, two, or three may move them into a designated area.

— Thomas Lane, University of Florida Extension Veterinarian

## Evacuating Your Pets:

# Keeping Animals with You

You need to consider where your animals will be safest. In most cases, it will be with you when you evacuate.

In the past, officials recommended that people leave their pets behind. But many people refuse to leave their pets, which creates problems for shelters and rescuers.

What we found out was that the population was saying 'Well, if it's safe for my dog and cat to be left in the bathroom with food and water, why can't I get in the bathroom with them, and I'll ride it out as well.' We had to redo that. If you can, when you leave, take your animals with you.

— Joe Kight, Florida Division of Animal Industry

## Evacuating Your Pets:

# Making Preparations for Fido

Developing your animal disaster plan before an emergency can save precious time when every second counts. Your preparations should include getting all your pet supplies together if you have advance warning of an impending disaster. You also need to find a safe haven for both you and your pet.

When gathering pet supplies for a dog, be sure you have a sturdy leash and possibly a muzzle.

You need to make sure every dog has its own leash and is familiar with good dog behavior, is socialized, and knows how to behave around children. So, perhaps the most effective mitigation strategy for dog owners is to make sure they go to puppy training classes. Get the dogs educated.

— Sebastian Heath

## Evacuating Your Pets: Preparing Your Cat for Travel

Cats can present special challenges when evacuating. A cat will do better during a disaster if you have helped it be comfortable around people.

What I suggest is that cat owners take their cats, put them in carriers, drive them around the block a couple of times, go visit their veterinarian twice a year, have them groomed, have them boarded, so the cats are familiar with being crated and transported in cars.

— Sebastian Heath

## Noah's Ark Revisited...

Have you thought about the “Noah's Ark syndrome”: traveling with two adults, two kids, two cats, two large dogs, and the parakeet together?

Perform evacuation drills in which everyone who would be traveling together learns how to share automobile space with your pets. Reward the pets afterwards so this becomes a positive experience. Often when we travel with a pet to places such as to the veterinarian or groomer, the whole family and all the pets may not be present.

## Evacuating Your Pets: Packing an Emergency Kit

As you develop disaster plans for your pets, consider creating an emergency kit. You should include pet food, bottled water, prescription medications and a first aid kit. Keeping your pet on a stable diet is critical while it's experiencing stress.

I recommend you have a small stash of their food available that you take with you, so that there's not a major change in diets. It's very stressful for pets to have to evacuate, the same as it is for people.

— Sebastian Heath

## How Well Do You Know Your Pets?

You know your animals and how they respond to certain situations? For example:

- Does your dog get upset during thunderstorms?
- Does your cat get upset in a carrier?

Discuss solutions for these behaviors during your pet's normal yearly check-up. If medication is recommended for use during times of stress, then have that medication on hand, if possible.

## Evacuating Your Pets: Be Careful with Treats

During evacuations, avoid giving your pets treats or extra food that could cause indigestion or make them ill. Sometimes, your efforts to soothe pets can make them more anxious or irritable.

The other thing is to not overstress the animal. What tends to happen in disasters is that people will try and play with their animals a lot more than they are accustomed to, but after a while the animal will get very tired and irritable.

— Sebastian Heath

## Evacuating Your Pets: Selecting Items for a Disaster Kit

You should include the following in your pet disaster kit:

- Copies of your pets' medical records
- Combs
- Brushes
- Food
- Food and water bowls



- Litter pans
- Flea spray
- A hand-operated can opener
- A blanket

[Kit items] ought to be in a waterproof container and be ready and available ahead of time to just pick up and go, so one doesn't have to run around trying to collect last minute things.

— Thomas Lane

## Evacuating Your Pets: Finding a Place to Stay

Although taking your pets with you has benefits, finding accommodations that will accept pets can be tricky.

We have a tremendous problem with public shelters, in that most of them won't accept pets. If people have to evacuate their homes, what do they do with the pet? If they can't take them to a shelter, they've got a problem.

— Joe Kight, Florida Division of Animal Industry

Temporary facilities can range from boarding kennels to a friend's house to hotels or motels. But no matter what your destination, make sure your pets are welcome. Several Web sites are available to assist pet owners in finding pet-friendly accommodations.

- Hotels that accept pets in Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Mississippi are listed at: <http://www.petswelcome.com/>
- Information about traveling with your pets is available at: <http://www.takeyour-pet.com>
- An example of information on pets and livestock is a Web site provided by Volusia County, Florida: <http://www.petrescue.com/esf17/>

## Evacuating Your Pets: Covering All the Bases

No matter where you take your pets, you should make sure that their vaccinations are up to date. You also should always have your pets' license and identification tag on them. Without the identification, you may never see the animals again. That's what happened after Hurricane Andrew.

Probably 3/4 of the dogs have no ID. And they're not wearing tags as coun-

ties in Florida demand. We can't find the owners, so a lot of these dogs will not be going back to their owners, and a lot of the kids who have these dogs aren't going to see them again, which is unfortunate.

— Denise Gaboury, animal relief worker

Situations like that can be avoided if pets have proper identification.

There are various techniques out there, everything from a microchip that is permanent and goes with the animal forever to just plain old duct tape — wrapping it around and putting your name and address on it. [NOTE: Remove tape carefully!]

— Joe Kight

## Evacuating Your Pets: Using Microchips for Identification

Microchip implants are now a fairly common method of permanent identification for animals. The chips are no bigger than a grain of rice. They've been used successfully in many species of animals, including birds and reptiles. For years, microchips have been used to identify wildlife, such as black bears and panthers.

Hollie Allender says its her only solution to keeping identification on her beagle, Maxie.

I have an escape artist here who has managed to escape just about every kind of collar I've ever had with her. — Hollie Allender, pet owner

The microchip is injected just under the the animal's skin, and it stays there the rest of their life. Each chip has a unique code, which can be identified with a special scanner.

Another form of identification to consider including in the pet disaster kit is a current photo of you with your pet.

## Horses and Cattle: Providing Identification for Horses

Identifying horses was difficult following Hurricane Andrew.

Of about 200 horses we treated, only one was branded, and only one had a tattoo.

— Farol Tomson, University of Florida veterinarian

Many of the rescued horses were from the Paso Fino breed, which is a small-sized horse.

For me, not being a horse person, they all looked alike. So how do you tell all these 198 other Paso Finos apart?  
— Farol Tomson

Although Hurricane Andrew initially left many horses homeless, all but 14 of them eventually were reunited with their owners — thanks to the help of volunteers. The remaining homeless horses were adopted.

Consider identifying your horses now, well in advance of any potential disaster.

Some of the nice ways are to go ahead and carve your initial, your name or your address into the wall of the hoof of the horse, if you have no other way. You can put neck bands on. You can ear-tag them. Tattooing is good. Branding is good.  
— Farol Tomson

## Horses and Cattle: Leaving Horses in Open Fields

Horses can manage quite well when left in an open field. In fact, they may be at greater risk in a barn than in an open field. Most barns aren't strong enough to withstand hurricane-force winds.

Horses tend to stay together in a pasture, and many have survived hurricanes with only superficial wounds from flying debris.

If you decide to evacuate your horse rather than leave it behind, it's best to leave well ahead of the storm — 72 to 96 hours before the storm center hits.

That's basically because it becomes a real problem. The highways are going to be clogged, and one doesn't need to get caught on a highway with a horse trailer and horses. People with quite a few horses need to make arrangements ahead of time of where they're going to put them and how they are going to do that.

— Thomas Lane

Horse owners need to be responsible stewards of stables or facilities to which they have evacuated their animals. There have been instances where large stable facilities are no longer available to accept evacuated animals. This policy change was due to abuse of the boarding facilities by horse owners.

# Horses and Cattle:

## Keeping Cattle at Home

It's not recommended to evacuate cattle in the event of a hurricane.

Cattle are gregarious, and so they stay in a fairly herd mode and will stay together. They also have the ability to avoid a lot of flying debris in most instances.

— Thomas Lane, University of Florida Extension veterinarian

Rescuers noticed that few cattle received substantial injuries in Hurricane Andrew or other hurricanes.

Consider the following precautions with dairy cattle:

- Secure fence lines
- Remove items that might become airborne to minimize the risk that your cattle will be injured or get loose
- Turn off electricity to electric fences

On larger commercial operations, most of them have some type of herd identification. Make sure you secure that paperwork. If we capture them and can't find the owner, the animals are awarded to the state. At some point in time, we'll have to do something with them. We can't keep them forever.

— Joe Kight

## Conclusion:

# Highlighting Key Points

Whether you're developing a disaster plan for a couple of dogs or a herd of horses, your top priority should be identification.

- You can do this with tattoos, tags, microchips, or markers.
- Take a photo of you and your animal.
- Put the photo and a copy of your animal's health records in a waterproof container. Keep a duplicate set elsewhere in a safe or secure area, for example, a safety deposit box.

Other steps to take include:

- Make sure all of your animal's vaccinations are up to date.
- Locate pet-friendly accommodations prior to evacuating. This could be in a shelter that accepts animals or in a friend's house.
- Map out a specific evacuation route.
- Get your animal first aid kit in order.
- Include a supply of food, water, and medicine in your pet's evacuation kit.
- Have enough carriers, leashes, muzzles, and bridles for all the animals you plan to evacuate.

## Conclusion:

# Doing What's Best for Your Animals

We spend a great deal of time and money on our pets and livestock for good reason; we want the best for them in all situations. This concern is especially important in times of stress.

Disasters can take a toll on both you and your pet. But you can help your four-legged friends survive the storm by including your pets in your family's disaster plan.

They need food, water, and shelter, just like any other family member, and they're counting on you to provide it.

Some pets and livestock may be able to sense the approach of a storm, but they can't do anything to protect themselves. That's your job. Plan ahead.

# Additional Resources

Florida Disaster Handbook  
<http://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Florida State Agricultural Response Team  
<http://www.flsart.org/>

Red Cross — Animal Safety  
<http://www.redcross.org/SERVICES/disaster/beprepared/animalsafety.html>

Humane Society of America — Disaster Preparedness for Pets  
[http://www.hsus.org/hsus\\_field/hsus\\_disaster\\_center/resources/disaster\\_preparedness\\_for\\_pets.html](http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center/resources/disaster_preparedness_for_pets.html)

Federal Emergency Management Agency — Online Training  
<http://training.fema.gov/IS/crslst.asp>

- Animals in Disaster, Module A: Awareness and Preparedness (IS-10)
- Animals in Disaster, Module B: Community Planning (IS-11)
- Livestock in Disasters (IS-111)