



TUESDAY, JULY 11, 2006

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In case of an emergency, you must be ready to act fast.

You Can Protect Your Pet From Disaster

By Brian Kilcommons & Sarah Wilson
Published: July 9, 2006

When hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast last summer, many evacuating residents were forced to leave their pets behind. Animal-lovers won't soon forget the images of thousands of lost pets, alone and afraid, wandering the abandoned streets. Any of us could be forced to flee in an emergency. With 163 million dogs and cats depending on us for their care, we need to plan for our pets as we plan for ourselves. Here's how.

ID Your Pet

Lost pets are much more likely to be reunited with their families if they are easily identifiable. All animals should have ID tags that include a cell-phone number, since your home phone likely will be useless in a disaster.

Microchips can provide fail-safe proof of ownership. Injected under your pet's skin, these rice-sized chips contain an ID number and other information. The implant remains forever, readable with a hand-held scanner. A clinic may offer microchips at low cost. Check with the nearest shelter or your veterinarian.

Also take several pictures of your pet. Be sure to get front and side views, and groomed and ungroomed photos for long-haired dogs.

Pack an Emergency Pet Box

You should have a special travel box ready for your dog or cat. In addition to basic first-aid supplies, here are some essentials:

- *Food and clean water to last several days.* For water, a SteriPEN (sold at camping stores and on the Web) uses ultraviolet light to kill bacteria, viruses and protozoa.
- *A small box with some lightweight litter* for your cat. (Make sure it's a brand he or she knows well.)
- *Copies of your pet's records.* Proof of vaccinations (especially rabies), a list of medications,

photos and other ID information should be stored in a sealed plastic bag.

- *A list of emergency numbers* of veterinary clinics, shelters, nearby friends and hotels that accept pets.
- *Any other “can’t live without” item.* A familiar toy can make a big difference during a bad time.

Be Prepared To Evacuate Quickly

During a crisis, there’s no time to hash out transport plans. Leashes and collars for dogs and harnesses for cats (all with tags!) should hang with car keys by the door. In an emergency, you may need to confine your animal in a carrier. If he resists, you might be forced to leave him behind. Training your pet now to accept a crate or carrier could save his life.

If you must leave your animals behind, bring them inside and leave them loose in the safest part of your home with as much food and water as possible. Self-feeders and automated water bowls can supply food or water over many days. (Pick a food your pet isn’t wild about, so he or she won’t binge on it all at once.) Set the food and water in a corner, away from doors and windows. Also affix a sticker to a window or door indicating the number of animals inside your home and your contact information.

Congress recently introduced the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act, which would require state and local authorities to make plans for people and their animals to safely flee in a disaster. Check your town’s evacuation policies and lobby to have them changed if they do not accommodate pets.

Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson are animal trainers and the authors of several best-selling books on pet care, including “Good Owners, Great Dogs.”

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