

## **YOU AND YOUR COMPANION ANIMALS: PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES AND MAJOR DISASTERS**

***Tornadoes, floods, fires, earthquakes, toxic spills - We know that disasters can strike any time, any where. When they do, not only might you and your family be in danger, so might your companion animals.***

- *Lives will be saved through good preparation.*
- *Be sure you have a good emergency plan for yourself and your family.*
- *Use this document to prepare to save the lives of your companion animals in case of an emergency or major disaster.*

**There are many situations when you do not need to evacuate, but are advised to find shelter within your own home:**

- Identify a safe area of your home where you can all stay together.
- Keep dogs on leashes and cats in carriers, and make sure they are wearing identification in case the house is damaged and they escape.
- Have any medications and a supply of companion animal food and water inside watertight containers, along with other emergency supplies. *See attached Emergency Kit Lists for guidance.*

### ***Prepare Today In Case You Have to Evacuate:***

#### **BEFORE THE DISASTER**

##### **ID your companion**

If you can, get your companion microchipped. All your animals should also wear collars with tags with name, address and cell phone number. Investing in safety collars (break-away or otherwise) TODAY may save you days or weeks of searching for your companion in the event you are separated in an emergency.

##### **Find a safe place ahead of time**

Because evacuation shelters generally don't accept companion animals (except for service animals), you must plan ahead to ensure that your family and companion animals will have a safe place to stay. Don't wait until disaster strikes to do your research. Make a list of companion animal-friendly places and keep it handy. Include 24-hour telephone numbers. Update this list periodically, because policies can change. Call ahead as soon as you think you might have to leave your home. *Please see attached list of local area hotels/motels that CURRENTLY will accept you and your companion animals.*

- Check with friends, relatives or other people you know outside your immediate area. Ask if they would be able to shelter you and your animals, or just your animals if necessary. If you have more than one companion animal, you may have to be prepared to house them separately.

##### **Have a disaster supply checklist**

- Every member of your family should know what he or she needs to take when you evacuate. You also need to prepare supplies for your companion animal. Stock up on non-perishables well ahead of time, add perishable items at the last minute, and have everything ready to go at a moment's notice. Keep everything accessible, stored in sturdy containers (duffel bags, covered trash containers, etc.) that can be carried easily.

### ***In your disaster kits, you should include:***

- A week's worth of your animals' usual food, drinking water, bowls, paper towels, a manual can opener if needed, and a spoon to dish the food out. Small cans (that don't require a can opener) are best, since you may not be able to refrigerate the can once you have opened it or even find a can opener (no electricity).
- Cat litter and a litter box. If it is clumping litter, remember to take the scoop with you as well as plastic bags to dispose of the waste.
- Medications and medical records and a first aid kit (stored in a waterproof container). See the sources referred to below, for details about what to put in the first aid kit. A companion animal first aid book is also a good item to have on hand.
- Information about feeding schedules, medical conditions and behaviour problems of all your animals.
- Sturdy leashes *and harnesses* to ensure that your companion animals can't escape. If your cat is not accustomed to being in a harness, it is a very good idea to "practice" ahead of time, otherwise your cat may be very frightened the first time. If you use just a collar, a cat can choke herself; breakaway collars are safer but can lead to the cat being lost; therefore a harness is the best.
- Carriers to transport companion animals safely, which should be large enough for the animal to stand comfortably, turn around, and lie down. When you have taken shelter away from home, your companion animal may have to stay in the carrier for hours at a time. Be sure to have a secure cage with no loose objects inside it to accommodate smaller companion animals. These may require blankets or towels for bedding and warmth. A companion animal bed and a small toy will help relieve stress, if they can easily be taken along. Since animals may have to live in carriers for long periods of time, purchase one large enough to accommodate your animal comfortably, leaving room for food/water dishes, toys, bedding, and in the case of cats - a small litter box.
- Current photos and descriptions of your companion animals to help others identify them in case you become separated from your companion animals, and to prove that they are yours. You can create small posters ahead of time with photos, name, address, contact information. You might not have access to a photocopier at the time, so having several dozen copies ready is good planning.
- We cannot stress enough the importance of ID.

They should be microchipped or wearing an up-to-date ID tag with the name and phone number of your vet, in case you have to board your companion animals or place them in foster care.

- Other useful items include newspapers, paper towels, plastic trash bags, grooming items, and household bleach.

### **As the disaster approaches**

- Don't wait until the last minute to get ready. Warnings of severe weather are often issued hours or even days in advance. Take advantage of this.
- Leave as soon as you can to avoid the traffic jams heading out of town
- Call to confirm emergency shelter arrangements for you and your companion animals.
- Bring companion animals into the house and confine them, so you can leave with them quickly if necessary. Make sure each companion animal and each carrier has up-to-date identification and contact information. Include information about where your temporary shelter is.
- Make sure your disaster supplies are ready to go, including your animal disaster kit.

### **Other evacuation tips**

- All mobile (and similarly constructed) home residents should evacuate at the first sign of a disaster.
- Evacuate to the safest location you can that is as close as possible to home. Long-distance evacuations can be a problem when highways are crowded.
- Listen to the news to learn of your community's disaster strategies. Contact agencies ahead of time to learn of emergency measures that are in place.
- If you do not have a car or other forms of personal transportation, arrange transportation with a friend, relative or commercial transport company - or learn ahead of time what modes of transportation will be available to you through community plans. Make certain that the transportation you take allows you to bring your animals.

### **If you evacuate, take your companion animals**

The single most important thing you can do to protect your companion animals is to **take them with you when you evacuate**. Animals left behind in a disaster can easily be injured, lost or killed. If they are left

inside your home, they can escape through storm-damaged areas such as broken windows, or be injured by falling debris or other hazards. If turned loose to fend for themselves, they are likely to become victims of exposure, starvation, predators, contaminated food or water, or accidents. Leaving dogs tied or chained outside can be a death sentence.

- If you leave, even if you think you may be gone for only a few hours, **take your animals**. Once you leave, you have no way of knowing how long you'll be kept out of the area, and you may not be able to go back for your companion animals.
- Do not leave your companion animal alone, with strangers, or without a leash, at any time. During an emergency your companion animal may panic, behave in a distressed manner (even become aggressive), or even run away and end up lost. *REMEMBER.... during an emergency you are still responsible for your companion animal.*
- Leave early - don't wait for a mandatory evacuation order. An unnecessary trip is far better than waiting too long to leave safely with your companion animals. If you wait to be evacuated by emergency officials, you may even be told to leave your companion animals behind, and you cannot argue then.

#### **Don't Forget ID**

*Your companion animals should be wearing up-to-date identification at all times, and if possible, microchipped. It's a good idea to include the phone number of a friend or relative outside your immediate area - if your companion animal is lost, you'll want to provide a number on the tag that will be answered even if you're out of your home.*

## **DURING THE DISASTER**

- Be sure to stay with your companion animals and console them and hug them. They will feel better and so will you. Be with them all the time they have a harness on.
- If your cat is not in a harness but is wearing a regular collar/leash, be sure to stay with him at all times as he can choke himself on the leash.
- Feed your companion animals as near to their usual mealtimes as possible. Feed them only half the

### **If your companion animal gets lost**

- Start looking for your companion animal immediately. Search the neighbourhood thoroughly for hiding places. Animals stay very close to home, but they hide. Cats normally are only one house away. Your companion may come home in a week, but you cannot wait that long.
- At the same time, report that your animal is missing. When the disaster emergency is declared, it should be announced where to make these report. In most instances, the report will be made at the place designated as an animal shelter. Check all animal shelters at least every day. Take a picture of your companion animal with you to show them. Fill in a lost animal form if they have one. If they have a list of animals found dead, swallow hard and look at it.
- If you find your companion animal after making a report, or it comes home, be sure to report that too.

### **In case you're not home**

An evacuation order may come or a disaster may strike when you're at work, on vacation, or otherwise out of the house.

- Make arrangements well in advance for a trusted neighbour to take your animals and meet you at a specified location. Be sure the person is comfortable with your companion animals, knows where they are likely to be, knows where your disaster supplies are kept, and has a key to your house. Give them written permission to ask a vet to give emergency treatment if needed.
- If you use an animal-sitting service, it may be able to help, but discuss that possibility well in advance.

usual amount of canned food and make up the difference with dry food, so as to reduce the danger of diarrhea and therefore dehydration caused by stress.

- If you cannot be with your companion animals and they are at a shelter, give them a piece of your clothing; the smell of you will calm them. Keep in regular touch to let the shelter staff know how soon you can take them home again.

## AFTER THE DISASTER

Planning and preparation will help you weather the disaster, but your home may be a very different place afterwards, whether you have taken shelter at home or elsewhere.

- Don't allow your companion animals to roam loose. Familiar landmarks and smells might be gone, and your companion animal will probably be disoriented. Companion animals can easily get lost in such situations. They will also not recognize the danger in downed power lines, deposits of toxic materials from a fire, and other things they may encounter after a disaster.
- If your house is damaged and they could escape and become lost, keep dogs on leashes and keep

cats in carriers inside the house (or confined to a **secure** room) until the damage is fixed.

- Be patient with your animals after a disaster. Try to get them back into their normal routines as soon as possible, and be ready for behavioural problems (sleeplessness, anxiety, aggressiveness) that may result from the stress of the situation. If behavioural problems persist, or if your companion animal seems to be having any health problems (diarrhea, not eating), talk to your veterinarian.

### The Windsor/Essex Disaster Planning for Animals Team

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#### *With Assistance By*

Steve Beatty:	Emergency Management, Ontario
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## LIST OF REFERENCES:

### Website Links

- Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, [www.ocipep-bpiepc.gc.ca](http://www.ocipep-bpiepc.gc.ca)  
Emergency Management Ontario [www.mpss.jus.gov.on.ca/english/pub\\_security/emo/about\\_emo.html](http://www.mpss.jus.gov.on.ca/english/pub_security/emo/about_emo.html)  
Humane Society of Canada [www.humanesociety.com](http://www.humanesociety.com)  
Humane Society US Disaster Center [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)  
Canadian Red Cross Disaster Preparedness [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)  
United Animal Nations' Emergency Animal Rescue Service [www.uan.org](http://www.uan.org)

### Books

- “*Out of Harm's Way*” by Terri Crisp (New York: Pocket Books, 1996)

