

Animals in Disasters

MODULE A UNIT 7

The Care of Pets in Disasters

Overview

This unit gives practical advice for pet owners and caregivers. It is the most comprehensive of the units in terms of protecting your pets in a disaster. It reviews the four phases of emergency management and gives specific recommendations for mitigating, preparing for, responding to and recovering from all types of disasters. Special emphasis is given to your emergency plan and disaster kit.

Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you should be able to:

- ▶ Prevent losing your pet in a disaster
- ▶ Develop an emergency management plan
- ▶ Act in a safe and responsible way during a disaster
- ▶ Aid your pet in the disaster recovery process
- ▶ Apply the four phases of emergency management to the care of pets in disasters

The care of pets in disasters

Although we all like to think, “It will never happen to me,” disasters can strike anyone at any time. We typically think of disasters as cataclysmic events such as floods, hurricanes, or earthquakes. However, individual family disasters are much more common. It is estimated that the United States suffers more than 150,000 household fires; 10,000 violent thunderstorms; 5,000 floods; 800 tornadoes; many forest fires and several hurricanes and earthquakes every year. Each year, two to three million people are affected by disasters. Many of these people own animals and must provide care for these animals and themselves.

Disasters can strike quickly and unannounced

Often you cannot prevent a disaster from occurring but you can reduce the impact of a disaster. A little planning goes a long way toward reducing injuries, death and suffering. This applies to your pets and yourself. You and your pets will need shelter, water and food. You should also consider the stresses that will be imposed on owners and their pets. Mental health providers are a good resource when the disruption of the daily routine results in pain, fear and confusion.

You are ultimately responsible for the survival and well-being of your pet. You should have an emergency response plan and readily accessible kits with provisions for family members and pets.

Mitigation

The best way to mitigate disasters for your pets is to avoid the disaster in the first place. Throughout this course you have learned about mitigation for specific hazards. All of these mitigation measures will help reduce the impact of or avoid disasters for your pets too.

To prevent losing your pet in a disaster

With unfamiliar sounds, smells and sights that follow a disaster, pets can easily become confused and get lost.

- ▶ Dogs and cats should wear appropriate identification at all times. Examples of appropriate identification include: tags with your name, address and phone number. You should also include the phone number of a friend or relative from out-of-state. More permanent methods include microchips, freeze marking and tattoos. Examples of appropriate identification for birds include: leg bands, microchips or tattoos. These are most useful if the information on them is included in a national registry.
- ▶ Current photographs of your pet will help with identification after a disaster. You should also send photos of your pet to your out-of-state friend or relative.
- ▶ Know your cat and dog's common and favorite hiding places. Once the chaos starts, this is where you will find them.
- ▶ Make a list of the places where you can get veterinary care, food, shelter and housing for your pets in an emergency. Find out what they provide and what they would need from you. Make a commitment to gather this information now. Special facilities may be required for birds or exotic animals.

Preparedness

Develop an emergency plan and practice it

How can you get started with emergency preparedness? The following recommendations will help reduce the impact of a disaster.

- ▶ Start by imagining the types of disasters that you might encounter. This is the first step toward developing an effective disaster plan.
- ▶ Develop a general family disaster plan. The American Red Cross provides excellent courses for this and has brochures that will help you and your children in developing and exercising your plan. Add specific plans for your pet.
 - ▶ Practice evacuation of your family and pets until you can evacuate within a few minutes. Everybody in the family should participate, including your pets.
 - ▶ Decide on a place where your family will meet if you get separated.
 - ▶ Decide who will take care of your pet and where he or she will stay during a crisis.
 - ▶ Determine the best room in the house to leave your pet if you must evacuate without your pet. This will vary with the type of pet you own and the type of disaster.
 - ▶ Make arrangements for pet care with neighbors, family and friends. Make sure they have keys to your house and leave information on where you will be, how you can be reached, which room the animals are in, and how to care for your pets.
 - ▶ Think of who you would phone outside of your area. Often people cannot phone into a disaster zone, but it is possible to phone out. An out-of-state contact can help relay information and keep your family connected.
- ▶ Keep a supply of quarters to use for pay phones as they will most likely be the first public communication to resume.

- ▶ The best emergency plans involve many people and systems that can back each other up. Here are some people and groups you need to get involved:
 - family,
 - friends,
 - neighbors,
 - your veterinarian,
 - your local animal control or humane shelter,
 - local boarding and grooming kennels, and
 - local hotels and motels in your area that accept pets.
- ▶ An effective and proven method of ensuring help in a disaster is to establish a telephone tree. Telephone trees work when one person phones two friends to see if they need help or to request help. These two people each phone another two people and so on.

Accustom your pets to sudden actions as would be needed in a disaster

Actions taken in preparation for a disaster include the following.

- ▶ Train your dog. Obedience may save its life during an emergency and help to make it a welcome guest.
- ▶ Familiarize your pet with its transport crate before a crisis.
- ▶ Familiarize your pet with being transported. You can practice drills with your pet by getting it used to riding with you in your car. That way it will not be unduly alarmed if it has to evacuate in a disaster.
- ▶ Cats can be very difficult to catch when they are stressed or afraid. Practice catching and transporting your cat in a crate and carrying it around the house. This will allow your pet to become familiar with the transport box.

Prepare a disaster kit for each pet

You should have a disaster kit for each pet. Do not store kits in the kitchen or the garage. These are frequently the areas where fires start. Kits and their contents should be easily retrieved and kept in rodent- and ant-proof containers. Check the contents of the disaster kits twice a year when the clocks change for daylight savings. Rotate all foods into use and replace with fresh food every two months. Here are some items that are recommended for your disaster kit:

- ▲ Extra collars and tags, harnesses and leashes for all pets (including cats).
 - ▲ Muzzles may be needed to control agitated and aggressive animals – for dogs, these can be made from gauze rolls or panty hose. A muzzle or towel can be used for cats. A towel can be used to restrain your bird if it becomes agitated and aggressive during the confusion.
 - ▲ Extra pet food to avoid diet changes in stressful situations.
 - ▲ Toys or blankets your pet will find familiar.
 - ▲ A manual can opener.
 - ▲ A supply of stored drinking water.
 - ▲ Food, water, and bowls for each pet.
 - ▲ Paper towel, plastic bags, and spray disinfectant for animal waste clean up.
 - ▲ Copies of your pet's medical and vaccination records. Boarding facilities may not accept your pets without proof of health.
- ▲ If your pet is on medication, ask your veterinarian about keeping extra supplies of medication or a copy of the prescription for these medications in your kit. Mark your calendar to replace medications before they expire.
- ▲ Include a recent photo of your pet.
- ▲ Your crate should be easily accessible and large enough for your pet to stand up and turn around. Since animals may be sheltered in open facilities, make sure there is enough bedding to keep them warm. You should also label the crate with your pet's name, your name and where you can be reached.

- ▶ A first aid kit should include only materials that you know how to use. Remember that if your pet has a problem and you do not know exactly what it is, you should consult a veterinarian. Useful items for a first aid kit for pets include:
 - bandaging materials to cover wounds,
 - animal antiseptic ointment,
 - clippers,
 - latex gloves, and
 - tweezers.

Your pet's health

To minimize ill health effects of a disaster, make sure that:

- ▶ Your pet's vaccinations are current. Most vaccinations are repeated yearly. Rabies is repeated every three years in most species, but may be required yearly (depending on the type of vaccine and State requirements).
- ▶ Keep copies of your pet's current vaccinations, health and ownership records in your disaster kit.
- ▶ If your pet requires regular medications, keep a current copy of your pet's prescription or extra supplies in your disaster preparedness kit.

Special recommendations for birds

The care of birds in disasters requires special consideration. Following are some recommendations.

- ▶ Determine if your birds need a continuous supply of power. Purchase a generator to meet your facilities' needs. Make sure your generator is in good running condition by starting it monthly.
- ▶ Make sure you have a sufficient water supply. Large water containers with chlorinated water (10 drops of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water) can be used to store water that prohibits bacterial growth. Store water away from sunlight.
- ▶ Aviaries should be equipped with an overhead sprinkler system. This will be very important to minimize smoke inhalation, cool the air and reduce the chance of burn injuries.

- ▶ Aviculturists should have enough carriers on hand to evacuate all birds. Many birds will run into their nest boxes during a crisis. Nest boxes should be equipped with quick-release latches and a hinge-type cover over the entrance to enable you to remove the nest box and use it as a pet carrier. Flights should be constructed with easy access into and out of them.
- ▶ Birds often require specialty foods. Make sure you know what these are and where you can get them. Although surplus food can often be refrigerated, this may not be possible in a disaster, when the power supply is out.
- ▶ If vaccinations are appropriate for your bird, be sure they are up-to-date. Consult your veterinarian to learn which vaccinations are appropriate.
- ▶ Birds should be tested and free of psittacosis and tuberculosis. These are serious diseases and are transmissible to many other animals and people.
- ▶ Do not leave your birds where they can be exposed to fumes from fires or chemicals. Birds are sensitive to smoke and fumes and succumb quicker to smoke than most other animals.

Response

Several actions will help ensure a safe response to a disaster. Several of these are listed below.

- ▶ Stay calm and assess the situation.
- ▶ Never put yourself or others at risk. Do not attempt to rescue your pet if your life or health or that of others may be placed in danger.
- ▶ Crate your cat or dog immediately. If you do not, your pet may sense danger. This will make them want to hide and they become more difficult to catch and crate.
- ▶ Listen to the emergency alert system on your radio or television for instructions on what you should do and whether special arrangements have been made for people with pets. Follow these guidelines and incorporate them into your actions.
- ▶ If your pet has been exposed to chemicals, get information on how to handle it without harming yourself. You should have identified sources of veterinary care and other information in your emergency plan.

In some situations, circumstances may force you to leave your pet behind. **Leaving your pet behind is only a last resort.** If you must leave without your pet, you should leave them in your home. Under these conditions, the following advice should be helpful:

- ▶ Under *no* circumstances should you *ever* leave your pet tied up outside or let them loose to fend for themselves. Roaming dogs are a public health hazard and owners remain responsible for any injuries or damage caused by your dog. In large disasters where loose animals become a problem, animal control shelters often have no other option than to treat these animals as abandoned. Many pets have to be adopted, fostered, or euthanized.
- ▶ Do not leave unfamiliar foods and treats for your pet. They may overeat which leads to intestinal problems. Provide water in a heavy bowl that cannot be tipped over.
 - ▶ Always keep exotic pets in separate rooms. Many exotic pets can be very dangerous to disaster personnel and other animals not familiar with them or who encounter them unexpectedly. Leave warnings and handling instructions for all exotics, especially poisonous ones.
 - ▶ Paste labels clearly for rescue workers to see what animals they will encounter, how many and where they can contact somebody familiar with how to take care of them.
- ▶ Make sure somebody knows where you can be contacted and what the needs and location of your pets are.
- ▶ **Leaving your pet behind in a disaster may decrease its chances of survival.**

Special
recommendations for
birds

The following actions are specially recommended for birds.

- ▶ Check your bird for injury and exposure to chemicals. If you have any concerns about the health of your birds, contact a veterinarian. If you think or know that your bird has been exposed to chemicals, contact your veterinarian before treating it yourself.

- ▶ Many avian and exotics will show signs of disease (respiratory, gastrointestinal, etc.) several days after a stressful episode. This is very common in birds. Any bird showing signs of lethargy, loss of appetite, depression or injury should be evaluated by a veterinarian. If the animal is bleeding, apply direct pressure with a small piece of cotton cloth until you can get help. Do not remove the cloth as this may start the bleeding again.
- ▶ If you have to move to new surroundings, do not remove your bird from its cage. When birds are frightened, they may become aggressive or fly away.
- ▶ If electricity is available, many birds benefit from having a heating pad under their cage in times of stress. Blankets placed over the cage can also minimize stress.

Recovery

When the disaster has passed, it is not uncommon to find that once familiar surroundings have been rearranged. Pets that rely on visual and olfactory (scent) cues may become disoriented.

Here are some guidelines that may help you through the recovery period.

- ▶ Check your pet for injury and exposure to chemicals. If you have any concerns about the health of your pet or their exposure to hazardous materials, contact a veterinarian before you attempt to treat them.
- ▶ If you have to move to new surroundings, do not remove your pet from its crate until it is calm. Do so only in a closed room.
 - ▶ Be careful in allowing your cat or dog out after a major disaster. Follow the recommendations of the emergency management personnel as to whether the environment is safe for you and your pet.
 - ▶ Give your pet small amounts of food and water several times throughout the day. The volumes of food may be increased to normal over three to four days.

- ▶ Let your pet have plenty of uninterrupted sleep. If you still have your pet's favorite toys, encourage them to play. This will allow them to recover from the stress and trauma.
- ▶ Avoid unfamiliar activities with your pet, such as bathing, excessive exercise, or diet supplements. Try to avoid diet changes.
- ▶ If you and your pet are separated, pay daily visits to local shelters, animal control facilities, veterinary offices

and kennels until you have found it. A phone call is often not as effective as a visit. You can also post photos of your lost pet. If your pet has tattoos, a microchip or other permanent identification, this will increase the chances of finding it. Be aware that collars and tags are sometimes lost.

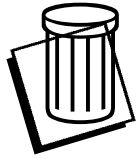
- ▶ If you find a stray animal, take it to a shelter or other facility set up for lost and found animals. Place an advertisement in the local newspaper to inform the owner where the pet was taken. Often newspapers run found ads for free.
- ▶ Share your experiences with friends and family. Talking about your experiences will help you deal with them and offers great stress relief.
- ▶ Consider seeking professional counseling, as recovery is aided when guided by professionals experienced in dealing with disasters.



CHECKLIST FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR PETS

Do you have the following items ready?

- Your written family disaster plan
- Disaster preparedness kit
- Crate and bedding
- Food, water, manual can opener, and dishes
- Plastic bags, paper towels, newspaper (when shredded, can be used as cat litter), disinfectant
- Collar, leash, harnesses
- Muzzles, gauze rolls
- Identification tags
- Current medical and vaccination records
- Extra bottles of daily medications or copies of prescriptions with current expiration date
- Current photos
- Pet comfort items: towels, blankets, toys
- A list of hotels, motels and boarding kennels that accept pets
- Detailed instructions for animal care and rescue workers
- First aid kit
- Flashlights, batteries
- Copies of health certificates
- Out-of-state telephone contact
- Flat tire repair kit



LEARNING CHECK – WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE CARE OF PETS IN DISASTERS?

This activity is designed to assess your understanding of the information presented in this unit.

Directions: Answer the questions – use the Answer Key in Unit 10 to check your answers.

True or False

1. Law enforcement and firefighters are ultimately responsible for the survival and well-being of pets.
2. Permanent identification or identification tags and collars should be on animals at all times.
3. Current photos of your pets should be kept in your disaster kit and sent to your out-of-state contact.
4. Personal safety must be considered before the safety of animals.
5. Turning your pets loose in a disaster always increases their chance of survival.
6. Pets lost after a disaster can always find their way home using olfactory or visual cues.
7. Disasters are usually predictable and preventable.
8. It is best to keep your disaster kit in the kitchen.

Multiple Choice

9. How often should rabies vaccinations be repeated? (For most species of animals)
 - a. Twice per year
 - b. Every five years
 - c. Every ten years
 - d. Every one or three years
10. If you are asked to evacuate, which one of the following actions is the safest for your pets?
 - a. Tie pets up outside
 - b. Let pets loose
 - c. Leave pets in your home
 - d. Take pets with you

Summary

In this unit you learned how the four phases of emergency management – mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery – can be applied to the care of your pet in a disaster. At each level you were given practical advice to protect yourself and your animals from the dangers that all types of hazards cause.

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