

Grassroots Emergency Planning Basics

CJ Anderson

Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi River floods, Mount St. Helens, Oakland Quake, 9/11 Terrorist activity, LA fires...

When one talks about disaster preparedness, the mind goes immediately to the drama and (often) overwhelming catastrophe of community wide events that overwhelm emergency services. We seldom stop to realize the other end of the scale occurs more often, and provides opportunities to lay a foundation of emergency preparedness that is both easily put in place and personally manageable to make a difference not only to our own human preparedness but the successful survival of our beloved animals. The following tips can make a huge difference when emergencies happen which put our animals at risk. (and can apply to cats as well)

- 1) **Use multiple IDs.** A combination of a microchip with either a tattoo or collar tag can speed recovery time and success. Reliance on microchip alone means someone who finds your lost dog also needs to find the time to take that dog to someone with the correct reader for that type of chip where a collar with a phone number and rabies tag creates a quick resource to act on. Also chips can be damaged if the animal is injured. Purchasing a high visibility collar increases the safety of dogs who escape at night.
- 2) **Pre-prepared Lost Dog Poster** with inserted pictures of unique elements such as breed, color, age, sex...), ready with contact information, and pre-identified places in the community to post signage which can be quickly printed and posted. When all that is left is to add the lost event information, many times the pet will be returned before it can leave your residential area or is taken to animal control.

Be sure to have a list of the lost dog online web sites, local emergency and other vet clinic locations where an injured dog may be brought, your animal control facility locations where your injured lost dog may be brought. There are many non-profit rescue agencies who also provide emergency animal services to lost injured animals. Be sure to drop off your poster at those locations and notify them if your animal is found.

An 8.5 x11 printed copy can be placed behind a florescent cardboard paper to increase attention and visibility. Use a spray adhesive to glue a clear plastic paper protector to the florescent cardboard and place a few lost pet posters inside for people to take which will also result in weather protection for the poster as well. Free lost pet poster template can be found at: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/results.aspx?qu=Lost+Dog&av=TPL000>

- 3) **Stress Reduction Preparation.** One of the greatest gifts one can give a dog is to prepared them to cope with the unexpected. From accidental injury, to sudden illness, from evacuations to hospitalizations, teaching your dog to be comfortable with the unexpected can contribute dramatically not only to the ability of the caregivers to provide quality care, but also to shorted recovery time. Teaching a dog to become comfortable with a gentle leader also helps them if they are needed to be muzzled for an emergency reason, seeing a crate as a den helps the dog needing to be confined for long periods during evacuations or health recoveries. Teaching your dog to relax

when a stranger handles him will speed up an emergency triage assessment or even to get exercised by volunteer emergency responders who care for evacuated animals.

- 4) **Home Emergency Removal/Evacuation Sticker** on front door or window. Emergency workers responding to a home fire, or chemical spill, will know to look for specific animals who could be removed to safety if found. One home owner almost lost their dog when a residential area was evacuated from pool chemicals in a burning pickup truck while the owners were at work and the dog was left behind. Many fire personnel are now carrying dog and cat respirators to be able to administer oxygen. Order a free decal (and pet poison control decal as well here: <http://www.aspca.org/about-us/free-aspca-stuff/free-pet-safety-pack.html>)
- 5) **Transportation emergency decal and wallet card.** Dogs should always be secured during transport. Many are injured or killed when the dog becomes a projectile during a crash, or caught between the lap of the driver and wheel/airbag release. Unsecured dogs also can run away during a crash, or even prevent rescue workers from helping the family injured in the vehicle, by standing guard/"protecting" family members from outsiders. <http://www.barkbuckleup.com/> provides a free kit which includes a sticker which can be placed on the window notifying rescue workers that pets may be stranded at home, with emergency foster caregiver numbers, when family has been taken to the hospital.
- 6) **Emergency foster agreements.** When an owner becomes catastrophically ill, loses their home or job, having an emergency foster plan in place that has been tested can keep the dogs from being taken to animal control for re-adoption or euthanizing if too old, too sick or too challenging behaviorally to re-home. A two phase arrangement should be considered. Phase 1 for short term care over hours to a week, which might include a pet sitter or kenneling with transportation and access to home, then the 2nd extended care fostering when the owner may have been physically incapacitated and is unable to care for a high energy or special needs dog during recovery. A sample written agreement providing for these extended care authorizations provides for clear directions and can be found here: http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/military_personnel_making_arrangements_for_your_pets/foster_care_agreement_between_pet_owner_and_friend.html

Estate Planning. When an owner dies, their pets are considered property to be taken to animal control for disposition. Quick and easy addition language and decision suggestions to an existing Will are available here: http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/providing_for_your_pets_future_without_you/d_sample_language_for_your_will.html

- 7) **Online documentation.** When the dog's vet is within an affected area, important medical documentation is not available. Copies of this information, including prescription information can be easily uploaded to an online document server such as Google Docs for access from anywhere with internet availability, (now a standard part of disaster and emergency response capabilities). Documents should also include copies of rabies documentation, vaccination records, special needs, and detailed pictures of animals including pictures of the dog with owner(s) and those who are authorized to recover the animal, should the owner be incapacitated from the emergency. Emergency Fosters (including out of the area emergency fosters) should be given password access to this site. Animal control will not release animals except to individuals clearly authorized by the owner.

- 8) **Create In place sheltering, evacuation route staging and long term relocation planning decisions.** You will be less able to care for your animals, if you have not prepared to cope effectively to the unexpected.
- a. Review and discuss basic decisions about when to stay and go based on the information available at: <http://www.ready.gov/america/makeaplan/index.html>
 - b. Review the pet disaster video, decision and resource recommendations for your animals by clicking on the pet Owner tab here: <http://www.ready.gov/america/index.html> If you have special needs there is additional information to assist with making more effective informed choices.
- 9) **All businesses are required by OSHA law to have Emergency Action Plans (29CFR 1910.38)** which are tested yearly. Business entities who have over 10 employees, (including volunteers or temporary employees) are required to have written emergency action plans which includes evacuation planning for the humans. Help your favorite animal organizations expand their plan to include animal disaster response. <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/index.html>
- 10) **Become a Volunteer Disaster Responder** as a member of your Citizen's Emergency Response Team or Citizens Corp community disaster planner or with the American Red Cross. Spontaneous volunteers are not allowed to work directly helping animals in disaster. HR 3858 Amendment of the Robert Stafford Disaster Relief Act and Emergency Assistance Act provides for search and rescue teams to also now assist household pets by federal law in the US. New FEMA modules are also about to be released to encourage communities to develop a better animal in disaster response capability, which will only happen effectively, with volunteer and corporate -preplanning support. More information can be found here: <http://www.citizencorps.gov/> and by completing FREE online training from FEMA here: <http://www.fema.gov/about/training/individuals>.

Therapy animal teams are also used in disaster response when certified by recognized national entities such as Delta Therapy Teams or Therapy Dog International. One needs to have experience as a therapy dog team however, which is gained by participating outside of disasters in environments such as hospices, hospitals, nursing homes, at risk children's groups...

CJ Anderson has been involved with emergency and disaster response for 33 years both locally and nationally, for communities, businesses and individuals including teaching the Humane Society University Animals in Disaster program, being a member of the Maricopa county, Az Citizens and City of Peoria Citizen' Corps, and Phoenix Az CERT member. She also is a federally accredited OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health outreach trainer, a First Responder Emergency Canine Safety Instructor Trainer teaching through Maricopa Community College, the National Safety Council and authorized Pet CPR/FA Instructor through the American Red Cross.