

Protecting Pets in Disasters

In the summer of 1995, locals Susan Sasso and Peter Svirsky penned columns for the Point Reyes Light on protecting animals in a disaster. They were especially timely: a couple of months later, the Mount Vision Fire broke out. Their advice remains vital today, with just a little updating.

Contingency planning for pets is an integral part of disaster readiness for households and neighborhoods. If you and your neighbors have taken steps to prepare for emergencies, including situations in which homes might be evacuated, you will help to assure the survival of your pets despite circumstances that could be highly stressful for you and them.

Advance Planning

It is imperative that you maintain identification and records, including current license and I.D. tags on your pet's collar (and possibly a microchip implant), photos and written descriptions of the animal and a medical history file with a shot record. Keep your neighbors and neighborhood liaison to the disaster council aware of changes to the number and type of your pets.

A means of transportation, such as a carrier or crate the animal is accustomed to and comfortable with, is also important. Store the carrier in an accessible place with an extra leash inside. Train your cat or dog to enter it at your command; try putting a favorite treat inside and sounding a bell at the same time. Repeat that every day until your pet comes running at the sound, and return to the exercise often enough to keep it fresh in your pet's mind. This will help locate a frightened animal.

Permanent housing, such as fish tanks and bird cages, should be secured against earthquakes. Tightened safety latches on doors should prevent them from opening when shaken.

Organize an emergency kit for your pets, or keep a list of supplies for quick assembly. These should include food and water for seven days, dishes, first-aid supplies and instructions, medicines, leashes of various types, and bags to dispose of droppings. The Marin Humane Society website lists what to include in pet disaster and first-aid kits, including those for large and farm animals. Click on "Programs and Services," then "County Animal Services," then "Disaster Preparedness."

Keep the medical history, and your local vet's number and the off-hours Marin emergency veterinary clinic's number handy. The latter is 415-456-7372.

If You Must Evacuate

At the onset of an emergency, get your animals under control in case you have to evacuate. But remember that most shelters do not allow pets, including the PRDC's shelter, so you should arrange in advance with friends and family to look after each other's animals if need be. If you're able to drive to a shelter, consider keeping your pet in your car so that you can feed it and walk it.

If you must leave animals behind don't cage or tie them; they will have a better chance of survival if left unrestrained. Provide a week's worth of water and food in containers that won't be tipped over, preferably in timed feeders.

Put a highly visible sign on the house telling others that pets have been left and briefly spelling out the situation.

If your pet runs off in the confusion, or is gone when you return, notify the 24-hours lost-pet clearing house at Marin Humane Society; that number is 415-883-4621; or email [lostpets\[at\]marinhumanesociety.org](mailto:lostpets[at]marinhumanesociety.org), per the website instructions. Give your pet's full description and say how you can be reached.

The MHS's website has a lost pet database, downloadable lost pet notices to fill in and post around the area, and a found report under "Programs and Services." Don't give up; a frightened animal can hide for days. Set up a feeding station and place clothes with your scent nearby.

Another valuable resource for all things related to disaster readiness is readymarin.org. Under the "Get Ready" tab there are pages for kids, pets, and seniors.

~Lynn Axelrod, July 2015~