

Being pet prepared saves human and animal lives

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Dave had never seen it rain so hard, for so long. Through the safety of his home, he and his Jack Russell terrier, Charlie, watched as a flash flood engulfed his neighborhood. To his shock, the floodwaters began pouring into his home and within minutes, the water was up to his ankles. In a panic and cradling Charlie, Dave realized there was no time to grab the dog food or Charlie's medication. They just had to get out and to safety.

Household pets rely on their owners to keep them safe. Pet owners should include pets in their emergency plans to keep them out of harm's way when the unthinkable happens.

We do not always have advance warnings for disasters. While blizzards, hurricanes, and tidal flooding can be forecasted and tracked, tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, and flash floods can take place suddenly, without warning. When requested to evacuate, pet owners should always take their pets with them; otherwise, their beloved animals can become injured, get lost, or die. It is not recommended for pet owners to remain at home with their pets instead of evacuating to a safe location, like a pet-friendly co-located emergency shelter. That decision may endanger people, their pets, and the first responders who may need to rescue them.

As people were evacuated during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, they were urged to take their pets with them. However, not all emergency shelters would accommodate companion animals. Soon after, emergency agencies began to include pets in evacuation and emergency shelter plans. The State of Delaware created the Delaware Animal Response (DAR) program to help prepare the community for disasters and emergencies that affect companion animals and their owners. The State further expanded protections for companion animals in 2013, by creating the Office of Animal Welfare (OAW) within the Division of Public Health (DPH) to protect the health, safety, and welfare of companion animals and to promote the human-animal bond. The DAR program, based within OAW, is comprised of volunteers that make up the State Animal Response Team (SART) and the Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps (VMRC).

Companion and service animals play a large role in Delawareans' health, safety, and welfare. According to the Delaware Population Consortium, Delaware's estimated 2019 population is 982,188. When that data is applied to the American Veterinary Medical Association Pet Calculator, it reveals that the state has over 264,000 pet-owning households that may include dogs, cats, birds, and small animals. OAW recommends that all pet owners create a pet emergency plan. Before developing an emergency plan, identify all possible destinations depending upon the nature of the emergency, and determine how pet care will be provided. Consider the following:

- Should a disaster or emergency strike when the pet owner is not at home, developing a buddy system with neighbors or friends will ensure that someone will care for the pets.
- If you are evacuating to the home of friends or family in another area of town, city or state, ask them if pets will be permitted to come with you during an evacuation.

- Prepare a listing of pet-friendly accommodations, boarding facilities, veterinary offices, and clinics outside the immediate area.

If you must evacuate to a shelter, confirm in advance if the shelter accommodates pets and what requirements they have, such as requiring owners to leash dogs or transport cats in carriers. Evacuation announcements should include the locations of emergency pet shelters and will vary based on the actual emergency.

- Know which local television or radio stations will provide emergency information such as general conditions, road closures, and the locations of local emergency evacuation pet shelters.

Being pet prepared also means having pet items ready now, in case it is necessary to evacuate with pets or shelter in place with them at home.

- Dogs and cats should wear a collar with identification tags, including a license tag for dogs. (State of Delaware licenses can be purchased at www.petdata.com/for-pet-owners/dlw/license-online.) If pets are microchipped, make sure the chip is registered, and the current owner's updated contact information is on file with the microchip company. Be sure to list a cell phone as a primary contact number.
- Have a pet carrier/crate, leash, and harness ready to go. Have pets practice going in and out of the carrier/crate, and reward them with treats, to make the process quick and easy.
- Create a pet preparedness "go bag" that includes the essentials of three days' worth of food, water, treats, and pet medications. Include a pet first aid kit (www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-shelter-health-poison-control/how-make-pet-first-aid-kit), bedding, sanitation supplies such as waste bags, litter and box, paper towels, cleaner, and a few favorite toys to help keep them occupied. Place an extra leash and harness inside as well.
- Have copies of pet vaccination records and veterinarian contact information ready, should the pet become ill or injured, or if the decision is made to evacuate to one of Delaware's pet-friendly evacuation shelters. Keep copies of these pet documents in a sealable, water-resistant plastic bag: make sure they include medical and vaccination records; license and microchip numbers; current close-up and full-body photos of each pet; and any special care instructions, in case the pet owner is injured.
- Pet owners should keep a picture of them with their pets on their smartphones in case a pet becomes lost or ownership of a found pet needs confirmation.

Take action with pets when a disaster or emergency strikes. Follow these tips:

- If sheltering at home, keep pets limited to one room. Separate dogs and cats, and do not let pets hide in the home. During the midst of a storm, it is best to remain inside with pets. If a pet must go outside during inclement weather, make sure that its collar and leash fit well, stay close to home, and watch for any downed trees or power lines.

- Keep pet collars and identification tags on them at all times. Keep small pets in their carrier or habitat that should be clearly marked with the pets'/pet owner's information.
- When evacuating with a pet, load a vehicle with the pet's "go bag" and secure the pet in its carrier, crate, or habitat.
- At pet-friendly emergency evacuation shelters, DAR volunteers will register pets and assist pet owners with their care. They will ask for pet vaccination records and special care information. Individuals and their pets will be co-located in the same evacuation facility.

For more information on the DAR program, SART or VMRC volunteer opportunities, visit <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/oaw/dar.html> or call 302-242-3594. In addition to staffing pet-friendly emergency evacuation shelters during disasters and emergencies, DAR volunteers provide pet preparedness information at community events. No experience is necessary; volunteers only require a love of animals and a willingness to help people and their pets in a time of need. DAR provides all training.

DAR's next emergency pet sheltering training is on November 2 and 3, 2019, at the DPH Training Center in the Edgehill Shopping Center in Dover. American Humane, a national responder for pets in disasters, will instruct this course. Delaware-licensed veterinarians and veterinary technicians will receive 11 hours of CE for this course. There is no cost for DAR volunteers. For additional course information, contact DAR@delaware.gov.

Resources

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health,
Office of Animal Welfare, www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/oaw/oawhome.html

Delaware Population Consortium, Office of State Planning Coordination,
<http://stateplanning.delaware.gov/demography/documents/dpc/DPC2018v1.pdf>

American Veterinary Medical Association Pet Calculator,
<https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Statistics/Pages/US-pet-ownership-calculator.aspx>

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals – ASPCA Pro
<http://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-shelter-health-poison-control/how-make-pet-first-aid-kit>

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health,
Office of Animal Welfare, [Paw Prints newsletter, Winter 2015,](http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/oaw/files/oawpawprints122015win.pdf)
<https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/oaw/files/oawpawprints122015win.pdf>