



**Humane  
World for  
Animals™**

Formerly called the  
Humane Society of the United States  
and Humane Society International



# How to prepare your pets for a disaster

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# Why you should plan for a disaster

**Since 2005, our Animal Rescue Team has responded to disasters worldwide, including hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and floods.**

We often face heartbreaking situations trying to save animals who could have been evacuated. By taking the time to prepare for a disaster, you're doing something incredibly important for your pets, your family, your community and emergency responders. When animals are part of the plan, everyone is safer.

This guide is designed to help pet owners take simple, effective steps to keep animals safe before, during and after a disaster. Planning ahead doesn't have to be complicated—but it does have to happen before an emergency. Inside, you'll find practical tips, checklists and resources to help you prepare your pets for any emergency. Read more pet care articles like these at [humaneworld.org](https://humaneworld.org).

Read about emergency and disaster preparedness for [community cats](#), [farm animals](#), [equines](#) and [wildlife](#) at [humaneworld.org/disaster](https://humaneworld.org/disaster).

## About Humane World for Animals

Together with our supporters, Humane World for Animals tackles the root causes of animal cruelty to create permanent change. We are encouraged by the amazing progress our dedicated efforts have made over the years toward bringing relief to suffering animals. This is a direct result of rescue operations and advocacy campaigns to create awareness and enact strategies to better protect and serve animals before and after disasters.

As an animal lover, we know you may be overwhelmed by the risks facing voiceless animals around the globe. The good news is we are working tirelessly with the dedicated support of our generous donors to care for animals in crisis and support families through and after disaster so that pets can stay with the people who love and know them best.

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Support our [Emergency Animal Relief Fund](#) and learn more about all of our lifesaving work at [humaneworld.org](https://humaneworld.org).



# What to do before an emergency

## Identification

Make sure your pets have both a microchip and a collar with an ID tag that includes your cell phone number. Microchips are great, but not everyone has a scanner. Most people who find a lost pet will check for a tag, so both are important. Double-check that your microchip information is up-to-date and in your name.

If you're unsure where your microchip is registered, try the [microchip registry lookup tool](#).

Read [How a microchip can keep you and your pet together](#) for more information on microchips.

## Caregivers

Choose a neighbor, friend or family member who can care for your pets if you can't get home. Give them a spare key and make sure they know your pets well. They should know what and when your pets eat, what medications they take and where to find everything they'll need. If you use a pet sitter, ask if they could help in an emergency, like if you're stuck in bad weather or at the hospital.

## Vaccinations

Make sure your pets are up-to-date on their shots. Keep copies of their vaccine records. Shelters, clinics, hotels and boarding kennels will ask for these records before taking in your pet during a disaster.

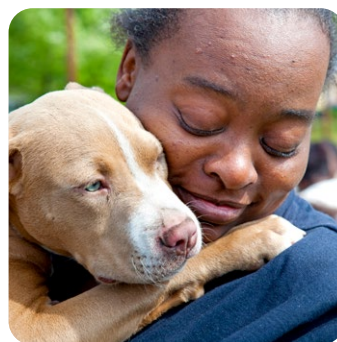
## Shelter

Call boarding kennels, vets, shelters, hotels and motels in and around your area to see if they accept pets during emergencies. Ask about rules on pet size, number or type. Make a list of pet-friendly places and their 24-hour numbers. Call ahead if you think you might need to leave home. The earlier you call, the better chance you'll find a room.

## Evacuation

If you might need to leave, go early. Don't wait for an official evacuation order.

If you need help getting out, contact your local [Emergency Management Agency](#) ahead of time.





# What to include in a pet evacuation kit

## Food and water

- At least five days' worth of food for each pet
  - Don't forget a manual can opener if your pet eats canned food!
- Enough water for five days
  - People need one gallon per day; your pet may need less
  - Pack extra in case your pet needs to be rinsed off after exposure to chemicals or floodwater
- Collapsible bowls
  - One for food and one for water

## Medical supplies

- Prescription medications
- Medical records in a waterproof pouch

## • Pet first aid kit (you can also buy a pre-made one):

- Pet first aid book
- Gauze, bandages, cotton swabs and nonstick tape
- Pet-safe shampoo
- Tweezers and scissors
- Antibiotic ointment and wipes
- Styptic powder (to stop minor bleeding)
- Activated charcoal (for poison exposure)

## Sanitation supplies

- Litter, litter box and scoop (for cats)
- Plastic bags for waste

## Restraint and transport

- Leash and harness
- Secure, collapsible carrier or crate large enough for your pet to stand, turn around and lie down

## Proof of ownership

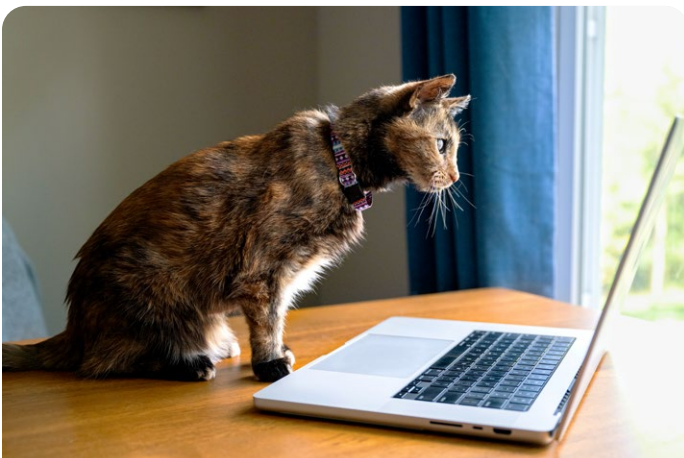
- Current photo of you with your pet
  - Proves ownership when you're reunited
- Written description of your pet (breed, age, markings)
  - Helps others identify your pet if you are separated

## Care instructions

- Feeding schedule
- Medical conditions and medications
- Behavior issues
- Vet's name and phone number

## Comfort items

- Favorite toy
- Familiar blanket or bedding (especially for small pets)



Learn more about disaster supply kits for [cats and dogs](#) or [horses](#).

# What to do if you can't find pet-friendly shelter

## 1. Contact local animal shelters or rescues.

Some may offer emergency boarding or know of temporary foster homes. Even if they're full, they might be able to connect you with someone who can help.

## 2. Ask your vet or boarding facility.

Veterinarians, boarding kennels and pet daycares sometimes offer short-term emergency shelter for animals, especially during local disasters.

## 3. Reach out to friends or family.

If someone nearby can't take you in, ask if they'd be willing to care for your pet temporarily until you can return home.

## 4. Call your local animal control or emergency management agency.

They may know of last-minute resources or pop-up shelters set up during emergencies that aren't widely advertised.

## 5. Look for pet-friendly cooling or warming centers in the area.

If it's summer, even just an hour or two in the sweltering heat can be dangerous. If it's winter, don't be fooled by your pets' fur coats; it isn't safe to leave them in an unheated house.

## 6. Evacuate with your pets anyway and keep trying.

Shelters and hotels may change their rules during a crisis. Keep calling or try in person. Spaces may open up as people find other solutions.

## 7. If you stay home, do it safely.

If your family and pets must wait out a storm or other disaster at home, identify a safe area of your home where you can all stay together. Put your emergency supplies in that room in advance, including your pet's crate and supplies. If there's an open fireplace, vent, pet door or similar opening in the house, close it off with plastic sheeting and strong tape.



## Asking for a pet exception during a disaster

### Try one of these scripts:

- "This is an emergency situation, and I have nowhere else to go. My pet is part of my family, and I can't leave them behind."
- "I understand your normal policy, but would you consider making an exception under these circumstances? I'm willing to sign a waiver or stay in a specific area if needed."
- "I have my pet's supplies with me, including a leash/carrier and vaccination records. I'll keep them leashed/in their carrier at all times."

### Don't leave pets behind unless it's the only option.

If you absolutely must leave your pet, never tie them up or leave them in a crate where they can't escape rising water or falling debris. Leave them indoors with plenty of food and water. Post signs outside your home describing the number and type of pets inside.

# What to do if you become separated from your pet



## Lost pet reporting and flyer checklist

- Pet's name and nickname, if they respond to one
- Type of animal
- Breed or mix
- Sex and age, including if spayed or neutered
- Color and markings
- Size and weight
- Microchip status and number, if known
- Description of collar and tag
- Where and when pet was last seen
- Behavior notes, such as shy, likely to run, food motivated
- Recent, full-body photo and photo of face
- Two or more ways to contact you

Losing a pet during a disaster is heartbreaking, but many animals are reunited with their families in the days and weeks that follow. Always make sure your pets have both an up-to-date microchip and a collar with an ID tag that includes your cell phone number. In case of separation, these identifiers will greatly increase your chances of being reunited.

### 1. Search your neighborhood right away

Walk or drive around calmly and call your pet's name. Bring treats, a leash or carrier, and a favorite toy. Look under porches, in sheds or garages, and around damaged buildings. Leave food, water and a familiar item (like a blanket) near your home in case your pet returns on their own.

### 2. Notify local shelters and animal control

Call nearby shelters, rescue groups and animal control agencies. Ask if your pet has been brought in and leave a detailed description, including a photo. Check back daily; some pets show up days after the disaster.

### 3. Use social media and lost pet websites

Check and post your pet's photo, description and last known location in lost and found pet groups for your area, including Facebook, Nextdoor, Craigslist and other community sites. Check sites like [PawBoost.com](https://pawboost.com) and [Petco Love Lost](https://petco.com/lost).

### 4. Post flyers in your area

Create simple flyers with a clear photo, your pet's name, a description, and your phone number. Hand them out to neighbors. Post them at shelters, vet offices, pet stores, grocery stores and community centers.

### 5. Don't give up

Pets can survive for days or even weeks after a disaster. Even if you've reported your lost pet, people might not match your pet with your description in the chaos that follows. Keep posting in local groups and calling local shelters and rescues.



# How to keep pets safe during wildfire season

Wildfires are becoming more intense and destructive due to long-term drought, changing weather patterns and land management issues. In the western U.S., the amount of land burned by wildfires has doubled in recent decades, putting both people and animals at serious risk.

## **1. Stay informed and ready**

Monitor local wildfire alerts and evacuation orders closely. Be ready to leave quickly. Fires can move much faster than expected. Don't wait until the last minute to evacuate with your pets.

### **Special considerations for birds**

Pet birds, including chickens, are extremely sensitive to smoke and poor air quality. Move or keep them inside away from windows and doors. Cover their cages or crates with a light cloth and use an air purifier nearby.

## **2. Protect against smoke and poor air quality**

Check air quality reports throughout the day and follow expert advice. Wear a mask if recommended. Keep pets indoors with windows shut. Use air conditioners set to recirculate or run indoor air filters to reduce smoke inside. Clean and replace HVAC and air purifier filters often.

## **3. Limit outdoor time**

Do not let indoor/outdoor pets roam freely. Smoke can harm their lungs, and fear may cause them to run or hide. Secure windows, doors and pet doors to keep pets safely inside. Let pets outside only on a leash and only for short bathroom breaks.

## **4. Watch for signs of smoke-related illness**

Call a veterinarian if you notice coughing, wheezing or gasping; heavy panting or open-mouth breathing; nasal discharge or irritated eyes; and/or weakness, fainting or refusal to eat or drink.



# How to help your pets adjust after a disaster



Disasters are stressful for everyone, including pets. Loud noises, strange smells, sudden changes and time spent away from home can leave animals feeling scared or confused. Even once you're back in a safe place, it may take time for your pet to feel secure again.

## 1. Be patient and calm

Your pet may act differently after a disaster. They might hide, pace, bark or meow more than usual, seem clingy or even forget their house-training. These behaviors are normal. Speak gently, offer reassurance and give them time to settle in.

## 2. Stick to a routine

Animals feel safer when things are predictable. Try to feed them, walk them and let them out at the same times each day. Keep the same food, bedding and toys if you can.

## 3. Give them a safe space

Create a quiet area where your pet can relax. Use familiar items like their bed or blanket. For cats, offer a cozy hiding spot. For dogs, a crate with the door open can help them feel secure.

## 4. Watch for signs of stress or illness

Stress can make pets sick. Look out for signs like vomiting, diarrhea, not eating, shaking or unusual behavior. If anything seems off, contact your veterinarian.

## 5. Keep pets indoors or on a leash

Even if your home seems safe, your pet may still be disoriented or try to run away. Keep them leashed or in a secure area until you're sure they've adjusted.

## 6. Comfort them with familiar items

Toys, treats and your scent can help pets feel more secure. Give them attention, but don't force them to interact if they want space.

## 7. Ask for help if needed

If your pet is having a hard time adjusting, talk to your veterinarian or a certified animal behaviorist. They can help you figure out what's going on and offer solutions.



### Help other families post-disaster

Shelters and rescues are often overwhelmed after a disaster. If your family is safe and healthy, you can help your community's pets by donating supplies, volunteering to clean kennels or help with paperwork, temporarily fostering pets and/or sharing lost and found pets on social media. Reach out to your local shelter and rescue and ask what they need most.



# Our mission

**Together, we tackle the root causes  
of animal cruelty and suffering to  
create permanent change.**



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[humaneworld.org](https://humaneworld.org)

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