

Storms and pets

Yes, it's hurricane season again. Even for those of us in hurricane prone areas, it is easy to allow our level of preparedness to relax. I'd like to review an emergency preparedness plan for your family's pets. Rule 1: If it is not safe for you to be home, it is not safe for your pets either. Before Katrina, many veterinarians in coastal areas were willing to board pets during storms. Hurricane Katrina showed us how many problems can develop by keeping pets in a coastal location during a hurricane and many vets are unwilling to accept the risks to pets and staff. This means you need to be prepared to take your pets with you if evacuation becomes necessary. Along the gulf coast, mandatory evacuation is going to be a fairly regular occurrence. With this in mind we need to have a safe haven arranged BEFORE the storm arrives and we need to have a pet evacuation kit organized before a storm arrives. I have included a list of items for your pet evacuation kit below.

Ideally, you have family or friends who will welcome both you and your pets for a few days. This is likely the least stressful plan for family and pet. If your pet becomes stressed during travel, remember to have any needed anti-anxiety medications with you. One of the more common issues with our recent evacuations has been the length of time many evacuees spend in traffic. Your pet will certainly need water during the trip and you will likely need to stop to allow them to empty their bladder. Even if your pet is not commonly on a leash, a collar and leash are mandatory when walking in heavy traffic areas. Additionally, your pet will likely be exposed to far more other pets than usual making current vaccines and parasite protection a must.

If staying with family or friends is not possible, find a pet friendly hotel or motel. You can find a list of pet friendly lodging at Pet-Friendly-Hotels.net or Petswelcome.com. Both sites allow searches based on city and state. Again, planning early is the key. Print a list of these hotels and include the list in your evacuation kit. Lastly, if you are planning to utilize one of the Red Cross Shelters, remember, Red Cross Shelters only allow service animals who assist disabled individuals. They do not have facilities for the general pet population. Here in Mississippi, pet shelters are usually set up very near Red Cross Shelters. Since the location of these shelters is based on each individual storm, you will need to call the Mississippi Board of Animal Health at 1-888-722-3106. The board also has a website at MBAH.state.us.ms. If you are in a state other than Mississippi, you can find your state's animal health

board either via internet or ask your veterinarian for their contact information. These shelters have several requirements which I have listed below. Please notice, these shelters are set up to allow YOU to feed, water and walk your own pet. I have included a list of supplies these shelters require below.

As a veterinarian, we often receive dozens of phone calls from panicked owners seeking medication to help their pet's travel anxieties. Make yourself a note to get your vet's advice concerning any needed medications and try to do that before the storm is bearing down.

Pet identification deserves special consideration. In my opinion, all pets in coastal areas should have a microchip. You will be travelling and staying in areas not familiar to you or your pet and there will be risk of separation. Collars and tags are needed but it is too easy for those to be lost or removed. Microchips are permanent and everyone involved in pet care, pet housing, or pet rescue is now scanning for microchips. Also, remember to register your pet's microchip with the company's national registry.

In our practice, we have recently begun providing our clients with MSS Pet ID Cards. These cards are about the size and thickness of a credit card and contain our contact information, pet vaccination records, a picture of the pet, microchip number, rabies tag number and any drug allergies. The cards also contain information such as pet's name, color, weight, breed, gender, age, and spay/ neuter status.

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