

Distressed by Disasters: How Can We Help Our Residents?

QUESTION

Dear Fair Housing Expert,

There are so many severe weather disasters in the news - hurricanes, fires, earthquakes. Over half of our community's residents own pets or assistance animals for those with disabilities. What tips should we share to help them prepare their pets for severe weather and emergencies?

-Distressed by Disaster

RESPONSE

Dear Distressed by Disaster,

The tragedies in the news are certainly compelling and daunting. Anticipating the unexpected is sometimes out of our control and in the hands of Mother Nature but it's always wise to plan ahead.

These events impact our critters as well us people! By letting residents know you're partners in planning you can prompt them to think forward for themselves and their fur babies.

Cover the Basics

Residents should focus first on basic animal needs that would accommodate them from three to seven days at a minimum:

- "Inputs" – food and water
- "Outputs" – a means to deal with what comes out the other end
- Medication required to treat the animal
- Means to contain and transport the animal

The mental exercise of considering how to respond in different situations can increase survivability. Here are some practical steps your residents can take that cost little to nothing:

- **Create 'Lost Pet Flyer'** - download a free template at <http://www.JoBecker.weebly.com/resources.html>
- **Compile Contact List** - nearby neighbors, friends and family to care for animals if you're not home when disaster strikes
- **Designate an Emergency Contact** outside of the impacted area to serve as an alternate contact if local communication lines are disrupted
- **Create Local Shelter List** so that if separated in a disaster, there'll be a place to start looking for lost animals. Compile the numbers and addresses of friends and family, vet clinics, boarding facilities, local animal shelters and nonprofits that would be willing to house animals immediately following a disaster.
- **Determine Safe Spot or Evacuation Route** If sheltering-in-place is recommended, decide which room in the apartment is best. If evacuation is required, create a list of family and friends, hotels and campgrounds outside the area that are less likely to be impacted.

Pet Preparedness Resources

There's an amazing treasure trove of pet-centric material available from these resources that offer a plethora of prep'er planning tips.

- ASPCA Prep Tips can be found at <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/disaster-preparedness>, and their Prep Kit recommendations are posed at <https://www.asPCA.org/news/disaster-prep-kits-what-you-need-keep-your-pets-safe>
- The Humane Society's Disaster Plan is at http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html
- The American Veterinary Medical Association offers pets and disasters info. at <https://www.avma.org/public/EmergencyCare/Pages/Pets-and-Disasters.aspx>, and
- The Red Cross has tips for animal owners at <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness#Helping-Pets-Recover>

www.Ready.gov has dozens of preparedness videos and social media tools, including preparedness texts to provide a steady stream of tips to pass on to residents. Those prep tips are posted at <https://www.ready.gov/september>. You can even download and print Ready.gov's free "Information for Pet Owners" pamphlets for residents and display their posters in common areas on your property; you'll find these free materials at https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1390846777239-dc08e309debe561d866b05ac84daf1ee/pets_2014.pdf.

It might also be a good idea to invite local officials to resident meetings to address emergency preparedness. Spokespeople from animal shelters, the fire department, or the emergency management office can provide helpful insight on the dangers and resources available to help your residents and their animals before, during, and after a disaster.

Helping your residents plan for the worst while hoping for the best can pay huge dividends for everyone involved.

Be safe,
Jo

Jo Becker, A Realtor®-turned-fair housing advocate, was licensed for eight years before joining a statewide fair housing nonprofit where she trained over 10,000 individuals in 10 years to consistently rave reviews. She focused on making the law accessible to housing providers and, today, concentrates on assistance animals and other critter-related topics.

Jo has also studied emergency preparedness and disaster response with a focus on animals since 2005. She is an Oregon-based speaker and writer who takes an entertaining, personable approach to educating audiences and readers.

Regardless of topic or industry, Jo's aim is to inform, empower, and inspire with historical and relatable context, understandable concepts, and bottom line considerations. Visit Jo's web site <http://www.JoBecker.weebly.com/>