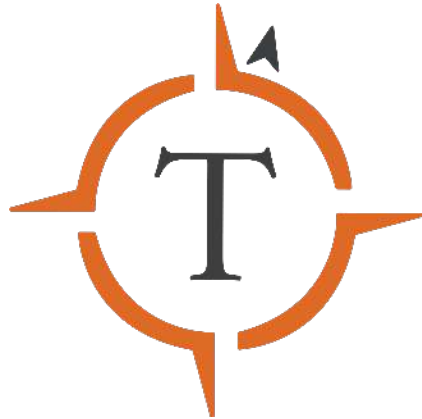


Tahoe Expedition Academy



How to Care for Animals in a Crisis

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Individual Senior Intensive

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We as Americans are facing unprecedented times. We are battling one of the worst pandemics in human history, forcing us and our animals to stay home. While many dogs may be excited about all the extra human time they are currently getting, many animals are not that lucky. Crises, whether natural or financial, can be devastating for animals as they often force owners into situations where they are no longer able to care for their best friend. Owner surrenders are ultimately devastating for both humans and dogs, and it is highly important to ensure you have emergency plans not only for yourself but for your dog as well.

It is highly important to be prepared for the next disaster. We frequently see disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes, ravage communities. Yet Americans are becoming more and more unprepared. FEMA says that 60% of Americans do not practice disaster preparedness, despite the fact that natural and financial disasters affected 218 million people annually between 1994 and 2013 (CRED). Another poll found that 41% of Americans say they are not prepared for a natural disaster, with only 39% having an emergency kit, 39% having a food stockpile, 28% having a water stockpile, and only 25% actually having an evacuation plan (Ballard). FEMA describes everything I just listed as essential in the event of a disaster.

What happens when we do not prepare for a disaster, and also fail to account for our pets? Hurricane Katrina is an example of what happens when we do not account for our animals. Currently, New Orleans has a stray animal problem that started right after Hurricane Katrina. A lot of people know about the devastating impact Hurricane Katrina had on New Orleans. When she hit, she caused 81 billion in property damages, a 150 billion dollar negative economic impact, and around half of the residents to leave New Orleans permanently. People know that, but the stray dog problem is one that many people have not heard of. It started as soon as former

Mayor Ray Nagin announced a mandatory evacuation on August 28th, 2005. Evacuation protocols at the time chose to overlook one thing families almost always bring with them, and that was their pets. At the time Emergency protocols and shelters did not include pets due to health and safety concerns, so owners were given a choice; They could either leave their dogs at home or stay behind with them. By FEMA's own estimates, around 44% of those who refused to evacuate did so because of not wanting to leave their pets behind. Because of the catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, to this day it is difficult to get an estimation of how many of those owners (and their pets) perished in the hurricane. Many of those who willingly left their pets behind thought they would only be gone a couple of days, and not a couple of weeks. Even more devastating are the accounts of those who survived, only for the Coast Guard to rescue them and not their animals. One victim, William Morgan, survived by holding on to a tree for 14 hours after pushing his poodle onto his roof. When the Coast Guard came to rescue him, he was forced to leave his poodle behind, with the Coast Guard saying to him "We are not in the dog business" (Grimm). Many pets who were left behind drowned either being trapped in their own homes, or on a stake in their yards. When all was finished, over 600,000 animals either died or became stranded due to Hurricane Katrina (Jonassen). The displaced animals now had nowhere to go. With a lack of spayed and neutered dogs, combined with a newfound lack of human oversight, a wild dog population quickly flourished. In 2010 the New Orleans SPCA took in 7,000 animals. In a request for funding, then chief executive officer Ana Zorilla said that without adequate funding, the New Orleans stray population could swell to 320,000 animals over the course of 3 years. New Orleans animal control has still not received their requested funding increase, and their stray problem still persists. In 2015, one estimate placed the stray dog

population at 120,000 animals. And in more depressing yet still relevant news, Louisiana is a popular state for dogfighting because of the high amount of strays created by Hurricane Katrina (Ring).

Now in fairness to FEMA and the Coast Guard, Hurricane Katrina drastically changed animal evacuation protocol in favor of owners and animal rights activists. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina HR. 3858, also known as the Pet Evacuation and Transportation act of 2006 passed, which authorized FEMA to provide care and accommodations for animals in future disasters. And during Hurricane Dorian, many hotels lifted their pet-bans, citing that same act as a reason for doing so. But while a lot has changed, a lot has also stayed the same. HR 3858 does not legally require FEMA shelters and hotels to lift pet bans during disasters, and FEMA themselves say that “most emergency shelters do not accept pets due to health and safety regulations”. HR 3858 is also designed to provide aid for natural disasters. It has no provisions for protection against financial disasters, which tend to have a further-reaching and longer-lasting negative effect compared to natural disasters.

The most expensive natural disaster ever was the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan, costing 411.3 billion dollars when adjusted for inflation. In contrast, Americans lost 9.8 trillion dollars in wealth between their home values and retirement savings due to the 2008 financial crisis (Merle). The point here is that the only kind of disaster we prepare for is the one that is far less devastating. FEMA provides aid when a hurricane takes your house, not when the bank takes it. As everybody already knows, the financial crisis was devastating. About ten million Americans lost their homes, the unemployment rate peaked at 10% (BLS), and millions of Americans’ retirement savings were completely wiped. And while we have mostly recovered,

some people still bear the scars of the financial crisis to this day. But what happens to our animals when a financial or housing crisis hits?

First of all, finding pet-friendly housing is both difficult and costly. While around half of all rental listings are pet friendly, only 9% of listings do not place significant restrictions on animal size or type. It is especially difficult to find listings that are friendly for large dogs, as only 11% of listings are large-dog friendly. This is before accounting for rentals that exclude Pit-Bulls, Rottweilers, Dobermans, or Presa Canarios. These are all breeds that are subject to Breed Specific Legislation. The city of Denver even bans Pit-Bulls outright. As I mentioned earlier, pet-friendly rentals are also costly. Pet-friendly rentals tend to require a pet deposit, which is usually between 40-85% of the rent. Pet-friendly rentals also usually carry a 20-30% premium over similar pet-unfriendly rentals (FIREPAW). As you can imagine, anyone who either loses their house or suddenly cannot afford their current house can easily find themselves in a situation where they may have no other option but to cede their animal. This is shown when comparing intake data to yearly crises. For example, In 2015 San Francisco was the most expensive place to live in the US. Databox reported a 50% median rental price increase over 2011 levels, a 70% increase in price per square foot, and a 20% annual increase in evictions since 2011. Prices became so high that a 180 square foot shack in Palo Alto sold for 1.99 million dollars. That converts to 11,056 dollars a square foot, or roughly ten times higher than San Francisco's current median price per square foot and roughly 90 times higher than the nationwide median (Zillow). Consequently, the San Francisco SPCA saw an uptick in both owner surrenders and pet-abandonments. 42% of the pet abandonments happened in the Mission district, a neighborhood that saw a 30% increase in rent prices from 2009-2013 and accounted

for a whopping 71% of San Francisco's Ellis Act Evictions (Moffitt). The problem spilled into neighboring shelters as well, with Oakland Animal Services reporting being at 200% capacity in both August and July 2015 (Dowd). The SF housing crisis is also nowhere near as devastating as the 2008 financial crisis. Almost every state or city reported an increase in animal intake during 2008 or 2009. In some places it was small. The SF SPCA only reported a 13% increase in animal intake during 2009. In some places it was drastic. Albuquerque Animal Control reported a gargantuan 400% increase in animal intake over 2007 levels. In 2009 the ASPCA put a number up to determine how many pets the financial crisis put in the path of homelessness. Their estimate? One million cats and dogs, or an increase of 20% over 2007 levels (ASPCA). These animals were likely abandoned or surrendered. As much as I would like to say that these animals got re-homed into another loving family, that is more than likely not the case. Shelters see 5-6 million animals every year and euthanize roughly half of them (ASPCA). That sudden 20% increase in homelessness means that it is more than likely surrendered animals were euthanized instead of being re-homed.

With a global pandemic currently halting the economy, one might think that we would be seeing a repeat of 2008 and 2009 with shelters nationwide seeing large intake increases. Astonishingly, the Coronavirus pandemic has not yet led to a surge in owner surrenders. Instead, there has been a massive boom in both adoptions and fosters, with many shelters actually clearing instead of spilling overcapacity like expected. The ASPCA reported fostering increases of 70% over last year in their New York and Los Angeles Adoption hubs, and when our local Humane Society held an adoption for husky puppies, the adoption page crashed after receiving over a hundred applications in 5 minutes. These are all surprising, but we still have to be

cautious. Shelters are still trying to foster out as many dogs as possible in order to prepare for a spike in surrenders. The best thing that can be done to help prepare shelters right now is to prepare ourselves.

FEMA says that “The importance of preparing ourselves for disasters is universal. Emergencies can happen anywhere - at home or at work - and everyone must take action to prepare for emergencies in case something unexpected happens.” (Roth). FEMA is right. Some disasters such as earthquakes or tornadoes come with little to no warning. It is essential to have a disaster kit because disasters do not give you time to create one. The NIH, Red Cross, and FEMA all stress the importance of disaster kits for both you and your animals. According to the Red Cross, your animals emergency kit should contain essentials, such as sturdy leashes, food and water bowls, 72 hours worth of pet food and water, medication and pertinent medical records in a waterproof container, a pet first aid kit, and a current photo of your pet in case they get lost. Both the ASPCA and Red Cross also strongly encourage you to get your pet microchipped, citing that a microchip could be integral to matching a lost pet to its owner in a disaster situation. The return-to-owner rate for microchipped dogs is 52%, versus 22% for dogs without microchips (AVMA).

If you do find yourself in a natural disaster, there are a couple of important steps you should take. If you have a pet, you should be one of the first people to evacuate the area. While some FEMA and Red Cross shelters accept non-service animals, most do not, citing health and safety concerns as the primary reason. Because of those policies, it is important to get out of the affected area before a natural disaster hits FEMA and Red Cross intervention levels.

Safely and quickly removing yourself and your pet from a potential natural disaster is simply the first step in keeping yourselves safe. If you live in the path of a natural disaster, there is no guarantee you will have a home to go back to. For anyone displaced by natural disasters, FEMA offers multiple assistance programs. Two of the most useful ones for pet owners are Emergency Lodging Assistance and Transitional Shelter Assistance. The first program, Emergency Lodging Assistance, is more useful for a pet owner who is already en-route to a secondary pet-friendly place to stay, and only needs a place to sleep quickly before continuing to their destination. ELA is a program that covers short term hotel stays for qualifying displaced individuals. This is useful for pet owners because it is much easier to find an animal-friendly hotel than it is an animal-friendly shelter. As covered earlier, it is rare for Red Cross and FEMA shelters to accept pets who are not service animals. There is also no database or website for shelters that will tell you which shelters do and do not accept pets in advance. Meanwhile, there are multiple websites such as BringFido, Petswelcome, and even Expedia which can tell you which nearby hotels are and are not pet-friendly. This can then be cross-referenced with hotels enrolled in FEMA's ELA program, which in the event of a disaster can be found at femaevachotels.com. There are a couple of catches to the program, such as you must first contact FEMA so they can qualify you for emergency lodging assistance. FEMA also only covers your hotel stay for a pre-determined amount of time, and FEMA does not cover pet fees or pet deposits, which hotels are under no legal obligation to waive.

The second program, Transitional Shelter Assistance, is more for individuals who do not have a secondary pet-friendly location to evacuate to, and instead need help finding longer-term temporary or permanent housing situations. FEMA describes the program as one which

“provides short-term non-congregate sheltering for displaced disaster survivors taking refuge in emergency shelter locations other than their pre-disaster primary residence”. When TSA is activated, it authorizes assistance under sections 403 or 502, and 408 of the Stafford act. What that does is authorize the US government to cover rent and utilities for qualifying disaster survivors. Under Title IV, section 408, “The President may provide financial assistance to individuals or households to rent alternate housing accommodations, existing rental units, manufactured housing, recreational vehicles, or other readily fabricated dwellings.”. If you are impacted by a natural disaster TSA is fairly easy to obtain. People who qualify for TSA are “Survivors who do not have the option to return home and are unable to have their housing needs met through insurance, congregate shelters, or rental assistance provided by FEMA or another agency” (FEMA). You also have to be a valid US citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien; and need to fill out a FEMA application for disaster assistance in order to receive TSA. There is still the underlying issue of a scarcity of animal-friendly rentals, especially for larger dogs. Luckily, websites like Trulia, Craigslist, and Apartments.com all allow users to filter for pet-friendly rentals. Some sites, like Peoplewithpets.com, even list exclusively pet-friendly rentals.

FEMA is not the only organization that offers useful housing assistance for displaced natural disaster victims. Local shelters and rescue groups tend to offer assistance for local disasters. BADRAP, an Oakland based Pit-Bull rescue and advocacy group, converted shuttle buses into mobile homes and then donated them to displaced paradise camp fire victims and their animals. It is also useful to check the website of your local humane society, as they often offer animal food, housing, and medical assistance in the aftermath of a disaster.

In terms of dealing with a financial disaster, the process is much different. With natural disasters, the primary issue facing pet owners is housing assistance. When a financial disaster hits, owners need less help finding housing, and more help keeping housing and cutting costs. Government aid for pet care is virtually non-existent, so those who need help would have to go to a different group such as a rescue group or humane society for aid. The Humane Society of the United States is a good group to check, as they frequently offer a multitude of assistance programs during financial crises. In 2008 they offered a “foreclosure pet fund” for pet owners facing foreclosure or eviction, and they also had an integral role in funding nationwide pet food banks during the crisis as well (Weeks). Food assistance is easy to obtain. Almost every major city has at least one pet food bank or food assistance program. If you are unsure where to find pet food assistance, simply contact your local humane society. Because of The Humane Society of the United States grants for pet food assistance, it is extremely likely that your local humane society has some form of pet food assistance. Animal medical costs are another large factor that contributes to owner surrenders. In a 2015 study, the ASPCA found that 11.96% of re-homed animals were re-homed because their owners were unable to cover their pet’s medical costs. For those concerned about their animal’s medical costs, low-cost veterinary care and medical support are fairly easy to find. Humane societies occasionally offer low-cost veterinary services, and for those who cannot afford animal vaccinations, free animal vaccination clinics are available, however not year-round. Another preventative measure one might want to take for their animal’s health is spaying or neutering. Spaying or neutering an animal reduces the risk of multiple cancers and uterine infections (ASPCA), and can also be done for free at seasonal clinics. If preventative measures are not an option, medical grants are available. There are multiple

charities that specialize in veterinary cost aid and relief. Some of the largest include RedRover Relief Grants, The Mosby Foundation, Brown Dog Foundation, and Paws 4 A Cure.

As of this writing, we are facing a Pandemic with major negative economic implications, and while we have not seen a wave of surrendered animals yet, they will be coming. Shelters are actively clearing themselves in anticipation, and Coronavirus hotspots like Tampa Bay are seeing 20% surrender increases over 2019 levels (Walser). In this uncertain time, it is important that we prepare both ourselves and our animals.

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