

Disaster Preparedness for Exotic Mammals



Definition

Man-made or natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, wildfires, hurricanes, and hazardous spills, can occur in any region at any time. As a pet owner, it is important to keep your animals safe during an emergency or disaster. Emergency preparedness can make all the difference in ensuring your pet's well-being and empowering you, as your pet's guardian, to ensure that their needs are met in such situations.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS KIT



- Copy of pet's medical record, including proof of vaccination if applicable
- Written and signed authorization of medical treatment for your pet in your absence
- Multiple copies of a current picture of you with your pet to prove ownership (include unique markings)
- Records of other identification (rabies license, microchip number, etc.)
- Important contact information—veterinarian, emergency contact, kennel, hotel, alternate shelter, pet poison control
- 7-10 day supply of food and water—include instructions for feeding
- 7-10 day supply of all medications—include accurate dosing information and administration frequency of all medications, including parasite preventatives
- Non-spill bowls, bottles (include a misting bottle to help reduce heat)
- Manual can opener (if applicable)
- Pet crate with bedding
- Plastic bags for waste disposal
- Small litterbox, litter, litter scoop
- Pee pads
- Favorite toys or treats
- First aid supplies — see below for a complete list of items
- Cleaning supplies — paper towels, disinfectant

Establish a safe place

When an evacuation order is issued, it's crucial that you have already established a safe place for you and your pets and you have an emergency preparedness kit ("go bag") at the ready with all items your pet may need while away from home. In some countries, government emergency plans may include options for household pets. However, some evacuation shelters will not be able to accommodate pets other than service animals. By planning ahead and finding shelter for your pet, such as a friend, boarding facility, veterinary hospital, or hotel, you can ensure their safety during a disaster.

If you are required to evacuate your home, remember that if it's unsafe for you, it's unsafe for your pet too. If pets are left behind, they can be injured, lost, or worse. If you anticipate an evacuation due to a disaster in your area, the first step is to bring your pets indoors and confine them so that you can leave together quickly. **It's important to have emergency preparedness kits for each pet ready to go in anticipation of a disaster.**

If you are not home during an evacuation order, make sure that a trusted neighbor can care for and evacuate your animals if needed. If you must stay despite an evacuation order, establish a safe place for you and your pets. Have drinking water available

for you and your pets, and keep water safe from contamination if possible. Although confining pets while preparing for an emergency will ensure that you can leave quickly, in the event you have no choice but to leave a pet behind, do not confine the pet. Confinement may prevent your pet from escaping fires, rising waters, starvation, or predation from other animals.

Emergency preparedness kits should always be prepared in advance, within reach, and ready to take with you at a moment's notice. It's essential to keep all medical records, proof of vaccination, and emergency contact information current in the go bag. If you can't be with your pet during a disaster, ensure you have appropriate written authorization for medical treatment. Make it a habit to rotate food, water, and medications from the kit out frequently to ensure they do not expire.

First Aid for Exotic Pets

It's important to be able to recognize the signs of an emergency in your pet. Some of the signs to look out for include:

- Abnormal vocalization
- Bleeding or obvious injuries
- Rapid or difficult breathing
- Changes in behavior, such as uncoordinated movements
- Changes in appetite or stool production
- Vomiting (for ferrets and hedgehogs)
- Diarrhea

If your pet is experiencing shock they may be unconscious, have cool limbs, and/or exhibit rapid, slow, or difficult breathing, or seizure activity. If you notice any of these signs, it's important to seek immediate veterinary attention.

First aid steps

- **Assess for breathing**
 - Watch for rising and falling of the chest and/or placing your hand in front of the pet's nose and mouth to feel for airflow to ensure that they are breathing
 - If unconscious, make sure that your pet is positioned on its chest/abdomen with the head forward upwards for obligate nasal breathers (rabbits, guinea pigs, chinchillas, small rodents)
 - You may pull the tongue forward to clear the airway if concern for choking or if foreign material is present in the oral cavity
 - If your pet is not breathing, begin chest compressions and seek immediate veterinary care
- **Assess for bleeding (if any)**
 - Apply direct pressure to the wound for at least 3 minutes. Apply a gauze and wrap to prevent further bleeding and seek immediate veterinary care
 - If a foreign body is present in the wound, do not remove it. Control the bleeding and seek immediate veterinary care



FIRST AID KIT ESSENTIALS

Do not administer over-the-counter medications without speaking to a veterinarian knowledgeable about your pet's species.

- Bandage material - absorbent gauze pads, adhesive tape, gauze rolls, sterile non-stick gauze pads, splints, tongue depressors, bandage scissors
- Wound cleaning materials - chlorhexidine wipes, over-the-counter antibiotic ointment, or silver sulfadiazine cream
 - Discuss which is most appropriate for your species with your veterinarian
- Disposable gloves
- Tweezers
- Towels
- Small flashlight
- Styptic (clotting) powder
- Eyewash and artificial tear gel
- Instant cold pack
- Instant hand warmers or electric heating pads
- Liquid diets (such as Oxbow, Emerald, or Sherwood Pets)
- Oral feeding syringe (10-20 cc for rabbits and ferrets, 3-10 cc for guinea pigs and chinchillas, 1-3 cc for small rodents)
- Liquid dishwashing detergent (for skin decontamination—only perform under the direction of poison control or a veterinarian)
- Medical-grade activated charcoal (administer only under the direction of pet poison control or veterinarian)

- **Assess for broken limbs**
 - Confine your pet to a transport carrier to prevent further injury and transport to a veterinarian
- **Assess for burns**
 - Use cool, not cold, water to flush. Transport to a veterinarian immediately
- **Toxin ingestion**
 - Call the Pet Poison Helpline or the ASPCA Pet Poison Control. Do not attempt to induce vomiting or administer other medications unless explicitly told to do so by poison control or a veterinarian
- **Seizures**
 - For ferrets:
 - If your pet cannot eat, rub syrup (Karo syrup® [Ach Food Companies], simple syrup, other corn syrup, real maple syrup) or honey on the gums. Take care of being bitten if seizures are observed—use a cotton-tipped applicator rather than your fingers!
 - Once your pet is more alert, feed a high-quality, high-protein meal such as kibble or Lafeber Company's Emerald Carnivore or Oxbow Pet Health's Carnivore Care and contact an exotic companion mammal veterinarian immediately. If the ferret is not recovering and you cannot get it to eat, seek emergency care immediately
 - Other exotic mammals:
 - Keep your pet safe and clear of hazards, such as hay, during a seizure. Transport to a veterinarian immediately

AEMV: Advancing the Care and Treatment of Exotic Companion Mammals since 2000

The purpose of AEMV is to advance the health and welfare of companion exotic mammals through information dissemination, scientific research, collaboration, and professional development.

Online Resources

Follow AEMV on Facebook (www.facebook.com/AEMVveterinarians) for exotic companion mammal tips and resources. Our website, www.aemv.org, offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help exotic companion mammal owners find veterinarians around the world.

Authors and editors

Marian Allison
Rae Porter-Blackwell

References

1. Oregon Veterinary Medical Association. "Client Education: Disaster Preparedness Resources for Animal Owners." Oregon Veterinary Medical Association, oregonvma.org. Accessed 27 May 2024
2. ASPCA. Disaster Preparedness. ASPCA, aspca.org. Accessed 27 May 2024.

