



Registered charity 1169511

## Preparing for the unexpected

Our floods of 2015 won't be forgotten in a long while, and the impact on the people and animals of Cumbria was well reported. While we were unaffected at Oak Tree Farm, we became heavily involved in the response to the natural disaster. From this experience we learned a lot of important lessons about things pet owners can do to help their animals.

One common thread animal charities faced was that people's evacuations with their animals were slowed because owners had no plan for how they would cope if they needed to leave their homes. A majority of owners had no carrier for their cat, and none of the cats were fully up to date with their vaccinations, which meant that owners could not temporarily place animals in a boarding cattery or kennel. This was a shame as insurers would have covered this expense in many cases. These prolonged evacuations also slowed down the rescue of other animals and humans.

Weather events or man-made/natural disasters happen at any time. If you have pets, be prepared:

### BEFORE

- Ensure you always have enough pet food to hand (so that they are not subject to a sudden change in diet if evacuated). 7-10 days is good as supply lines to shops may be disrupted during an emergency. Keep some dry food and large water bowls so if you do need to be evacuated for several days and you cannot take the animal with you to start off with, water and food can be left somewhere safe, high up and dry in an emergency.
- Make sure they are fully up to date with vaccinations (this must include a yearly booster) and you have the card or certificate to hand. At the time of the 2015 floods, the Refuge was asked to take in a large number of unvaccinated pets. This created a potential health issue as many illnesses are airborne so having lots of cats together is a huge risk.
- Get your dogs and cats microchipped (this is the law for dogs) and keep the chip registration up to date if you move (also a legal requirement for dogs). That way if your animals are separated from you during floods or events, you can easily be reunited. Register any ongoing medical conditions with the chip database so your pet, if rescued, can get its meds. Make sure your dogs are collar-tagged, you may want to also collar and tag your cat in the immediate period prior to any known storms or emergency just to be safe.
- For cats or other smaller animals – have a carrier! The lack of a carrier for cats severely delayed many evacuations and held up the emergency services from reaching other residents more quickly. Make sure the carrier is secure, all the door clips are working, and get the cat used to going in and out of it.
- For dogs – leads, coats, collar and some chews and toys to alleviate boredom. A folding dog crate is even better.
- Always have enough of any of your pet's medication to last at least a week – the floods happened on a Saturday when many vet practices were shut.
- For animals that cannot be brought into the home such as livestock, check their shelter to ensure that they will be safe from the elements and flying debris.
- Have a plan with friends or relatives for whether they could help by housing your animal for you in the immediate aftermath of the events for a few days.
- Have a good photo of your pet, ideally electronically to send by phone or email to ID them

### DURING:

- If you know that your animal has been evacuated by the emergency services, the RSPCA or us, make contact straight away to save us additional work in trying to trace you. During a local emergency or evacuation, it is likely that the human emergency services will coordinate the evacuation of animals with the RSPCA. Keep their number handy for emergencies – it is 0300 1234999 (this is the national number rather than the local Carlisle clinic).
- NEVER leave pets behind. Review your evacuation plans before the storm and know a safe place where your pets can go if you need to evacuate. Remember they are totally dependent on you if crated.
- Secure exits and cat doors so pets can't escape into the storm or flood.
- Do not tranquilize your animals. They'll need to be fully with-it to adapt to any journeys or changes.

### AFTER:

- After the storm or flood, displaced objects and fallen trees can disorient pets and sharp debris could harm them.
- Give animals time to become re-oriented. Familiar scents and landmarks may be altered and cause a pet to become confused or lost. If you have been evacuated for an extended time, then when you return home you will need to keep your cat indoors for a fortnight or so afterwards before allowing them outside.
- Keep kids and animals away from hazards such as downed power lines and water that may be contaminated

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