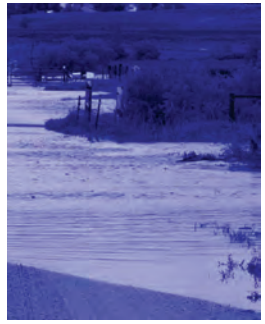




# Disaster Preparedness

For Wildlife Rehabilitators and Educators



**As a wildlife professional, one of our worst fears is the thought of a natural disaster striking our facility. Disasters can strike at a moment's notice. The U.S. regularly experiences a variety of natural disasters due to its vast size and geographic diversity. While a disaster can occur due to any extreme natural event such as hurricane, fire, flood or earthquake, it is technically characterized by causing a significant amount of damage and/or loss of life. The following tips can help wildlife facilities be prepared to respond in the event of an emergency.**

## **PREPARE AND PLAN**

Know the types of natural disasters you may experience in your area and, for each one, decide whether you should evacuate or not. Natural disasters like fire, hurricanes and floods will require an evacuation, while others like blizzards will require that you stay put.

Assemble an evacuation kit with a week's worth of supplies, including:

- Food, water and medications
- Copies of animal records/patient care sheets\*
- Copies of important permits/documents\*
- Supplies for cage/kennel cleaning
- Any other necessary supplies

Keep the kit in an easily accessible location by an exterior door and be sure all staff and volunteers know where it is.

\*Consider storing digital copies of important files on a laptop/tablet, flash drive, or a cloud-based service. This could save much time, effort and worry (as well as vehicle space) in an emergency.

Compile a list of important phone numbers and keep updated copies in your facility and in the disaster kit. Consider including contact information for the local game warden, state and federal resources, your veterinarian, key staff and volunteers, other area shelters, and the American Red Cross.

Determine the primary evacuation locations (you may need to have more than one). Picking a safe place where everyone knows they can take the animals will save stress and time during an emergency. Talk to local vets, animal shelters, volunteers, friends, associates, etc., and decide on one or two places that would be best suited to house the animals in an emergency.

Communicate to all staff and volunteers the evacuation locations, emergency phone numbers, and evacuation plan, and keep everyone

updated on any information changes. Display hard copies of the exact whereabouts of your designated shelters/care locations and associated contact information. Ensure staff have this information on their cell phones and other mobile devices.

Take a day to practice (without animals) the steps listed in your evacuation plan. Running through this drill periodically will help staff react better in an actual emergency and help you gauge how much time it takes to carry out the plan.

Consider having an annual tour/training for rescue personnel so they know how to respond in the event of an emergency. Have a map of all enclosures accessible to first responders.

## **COMMUNICATION IS KEY**

Contact local emergency management and stay informed through media resources. You can also check [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

Consider starting a designated disaster preparedness fund for your facility.

## **EVACUATE**

People first. You can't save lives if you yourself need rescuing. Always assess the entire scene first to determine if it is safe for you to proceed. For example, watch for downed electrical lines or swiftly moving water. While you will naturally want to save as many animal lives as possible, you must take care of yourself first.

So long as the scene is safe, get all the animals out in an order that makes sense, whether by room, by species, by ease of access, etc.

If time allows, write "EVACUATED" somewhere visible so rescue workers don't waste time looking for people or animals.

## **RECOVER**

Once in a safe location, account for all personnel and animals.

Conduct a brief visual exam of every animal and respond to any concerns. Make sure everyone is cared for; keep your veterinarian on call. Stay updated on the status of the emergency so you can know when and how the situation is changing and can decide next steps from there.