

Hurricane Katrina: A Lesson in Emergency Preparedness for You and Your Dog

By Kimberly Zlatin © 2005

Heart wrenching images of Hurricane Katrina's four-legged victims are too much for most of us to bear. Fortunately the majority of people around the country have their loving companions next to them while they are watching the devastating news of dogs left to fend for themselves and people making the choice of their pet or their own rescue. A disaster such as Hurricane Katrina is not a common occurrence, but it does bring up important questions about what you would do with your dog if an emergency did arise in your household and you were unable to return to your home. Some important facts to keep in mind:

- Is your dog microchipped? The majority of shelters have a scanning device that can read the microchip that is placed under your dog's skin. The microchip carries important identifying information for your dog and can be provided at many shelters and vet's offices for a nominal fee in a matter of seconds.
- Make sure your dog has a collar with updated identification tags. This is a simple way for people to contact you if your dog has been found.
- Find out where lost dogs are taken in your neighborhood. Some cities have a central location where dogs are placed for the first 24-48 hours before being relocated to area shelters. Save yourself time by doing a little research now!
- Have a sign in your window so emergency personnel know that there is a pet inside your home that needs to be rescued.
- Have a designated person(s) to check in on your pet in case of an emergency. Give them a list of reputable boarding facilities just in case they are not able to take your dog into their own home.
- Where are your local emergency vet clinics? You do not want to be scrambling for this information when your dog needs immediate care.
- Is your dog up to date on vaccinations? If your dog is placed in a shelter, boarding facility, or lost on the street you want to make sure that he is protected against diseases that he would not otherwise be exposed to in your home.
- Where can you go with your dog if you must leave your home unexpectedly? Keep a list of dog-friendly hotels so you know where you can go if you are unable to stay in your home.
- Bring familiar objects for your dog. If possible, grab a favorite toy or dog bed with familiar scents that can reduce anxiety in a stressful situation.
- Never underestimate the power of the internet! Email yourself or a friend a picture of your dog so you have a picture available to post in case of separation. You can send the picture to local shelters and websites such as Craigslist.com or Petfinder.com.

A little advanced planning on your part could be the difference between a happy reunion or heartache for you and your dog. While we all pray that we will never need to use this information, having it on hand as a quick reference can bring some peace of mind in an emergency situation.

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