

# Advice for pet owners during emergencies

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Under the State Disaster Plan, NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) is responsible for coordinating animal welfare relief services for livestock, wildlife and companion animals. While NSW DPI can help, you are responsible for your animals.

An emergency may require anything from a brief absence from your home to long term evacuation, so it is important that you plan and be prepared for evacuation during an emergency. This preparation should include your pets or other animals in your care. During an emergency it will be difficult to consider everything that is required so planning ahead will assist. The more prepared you are the easier it will be during an emergency. Ensure the welfare and safety of your pets during an emergency evacuation **but do not risk your own safety**. Remember that pets cannot survive on their own and that they may also go missing during the emergency or while you are absent causing further distress.

Pet type will vary, so owners need to plan what will be the best for their pet. For example, small pets like cats, dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits and birds may be evacuated from the property, while larger pets such as horses may either be evacuated or placed on a safe area on the property, such as high ground in a flood or bare ground during a fire.

If evacuated during an emergency by the police, you are encouraged to take pets with you to the evacuation centre or some other safe area. Remember that evacuation centres established during an emergency will expect pets to accompany their owners and will be generally prepared to assist and accommodate your pet needs. Your pets may stay with you or be collected by an animal welfare organisation and cared for.

If you are not leaving your property during an emergency, bring all smaller pets such as cats, dogs and birds inside the house (choose rooms that are easy to clean such as bathrooms, laundries and toilets). Remember that pets will also be stressed by these events and may panic or run away if afraid. Try to avoid leaving dogs tied up outside as they may suffer harm, especially in fires. After an emergency event watch pets closely as changes resulting from the emergency, such as the changes to familiar scents or the burnt landscape may confuse them.

### In preparation for emergencies or evacuation you should consider:

- having plans in place and consider whether pets will be evacuated or moved to a safe location;
- listen to news updates and call established hotlines on any emergency that is likely to impact on your property;
- ensure equipment such as food, water, containers, collars, leads, medicines, vet records, cat litter, etc are readily accessible;
- confine birds, dogs and cats to the house;
- place small animals and birds into suitable carry containers and place them near the door in readiness for evacuation;
- identify and move larger pets such as horses to a safe area on the property or prepare them for removal;
- fit halters or collars to all pets and have leads ready;
- ensure each pet or cage has a firmly attached up to date identification label showing your name, address and contact details;
- when preparing bird cages, cover the cage to provide security to reduce stress.

### Should evacuation be necessary you may be required to notify NSW DPI of:

- the location of your pets;



- the number and type of pets;
- any inability to take your pets with you;
- whether the pets will stay on the property, and where or whether they need to be evacuated;
- if evacuating, your handling facilities such as yards, loading ramps, stock crates, cages etc;
- whether you have a suitable vehicle to move pets;
- food availability for the pets;
- whether there are problem animals such as savage dogs or unbroken horses;
- any veterinary medication or health problems;
- the contact details of the owners or an alternate contact; and
- whether you have alternative accommodation or agistment arrangements for pets after the immediate danger period.

#### **Cats and dogs may require:**

- a carrier for your cat with details attached such as the cats name, a description and owner contact details (carriers are available from pet shops, veterinary clinics, NSW Animal Welfare League and the RSPCA);
- a collar, lead or chain for your dog;
- an up to date identification tag (attach an identification disc with engraved contact details and your council registration tag);
- suitable food, water and containers;
- litter for the cat; and
- any medicines that are being administered.

#### **Birds may require:**

- a cage with a perch that has the owners identification details on it;
- something to cover the cage (towel or cloth) to reduce stress; and
- suitable food, water and containers.

#### **Horses may require:**

- a safe area if staying on the property (if doing this it may be useful to remove all equipment from the horse as rugs can burn, nylon and plastic headstalls can melt and metal pieces can heat up);
- facilities to remove them if evacuating;
- a headstall or halter and lead (avoid using synthetic equipment such as nylon and plastic that will burn);

- all equipment should be identified with the owners details; and
- suitable fodder and water.

#### **Handling difficult animals:**

- cats - hold scruff of neck and place in a carrier;
- dogs - use a muzzle or tear up a sheet and place around the muzzle, cross under the neck, around the back of the ears and tie (short term only); and
- horses - blindfold and lead from the left side with your hand and elbow close to the horse.

#### **How do you know when to evacuate?**

The following will provide advice through the media or may knock on your door:

- State Emergency Service (Flood emergency) on [www.ses.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ses.nsw.gov.au);
- Rural Fire Service (Bushfire emergency) on: [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au);
- Listen to your local TV/radio station for updates on the emergency;
- NSW police; and
- from the Local Emergency Operation Centre (if activated).

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Check for updates of this Primefact at:  
[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts)

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (November 2006). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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