

Hurricane Evacuation

Don't forget the one's you love: the furry ones that is!

When a hurricane enters the Gulf of Mexico those of us that live along the coast start thinking, and hopefully preparing for, a worse case scenario: a direct hit from a Category 5 hurricane.

But, as we all know, it does not take a direct hit, or a Category 5, to require a mandatory evacuation from the coastal bend and/or causing a great deal of damage to our homes and unsettling our lives.

Now is the time to plan for that possibility.

Remember all those pictures on the news last year after hurricane Katrina leveled New Orleans? Tens of thousands of animals became homeless or perished, many pet owners stayed with their pets and perished because they would not evacuate without their beloved pets.

On October 6, 2006 President Bush signed a bill, Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS), requiring the inclusion of companion animals in disaster planning at the state and local levels. This bill grants FEMA the authority to assist states and local communities in developing disaster plans and in doing so will qualify for grants from FEMA. Louisiana has already put into place evacuation plans that include house hold pets.

The state of Texas has not yet implemented an evacuation plan that would provide our furry family members a safe ride out of town and a place to stay in the event of a disaster.

There is a bill (HB 88) making it's way through the system relating to the evacuation and sheltering of service animals and household pets in a disaster. The bill has passed the House of Representatives and is now in the Senate. Our very own Senator Juan 'Chuy' Hinojosa is the chair of this committee.

Unfortunately these things take time and local governments are slow in acting on anything that will require money to be spent out of their coffers if they are not made to do so.

While we wait, ever so patiently, for this bill to make it through the Senate, and then signed by the governor, there are things you can do to prepare for including your pet in an evacuation.

Have a Pet Disaster Supplies Kit ready to go which should include:

- >Medications, medical records (will be required if housed in a public place or kennels), store records in a waterproof container.
- >Make sure all dogs and cats are wearing collars with up to date information.
- >Leashes, harnesses, and/or carriers to transport pets safely and endure that your animals can't escape. Having a crate on hand and ready to go is your best choice.
- >Current photos of your pets in case they get lost.
- >Food (two week supply is recommend), potable water, bowls, cat litter/pan, and can opener

>Information on feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems, and the name and number of your veterinarian in case you have to board or foster your pets.

>Pet beds and toys, if easily transportable.

Have an idea where a safe place to go is that will take pets, most hotels/motels make exceptions during an emergency and waive their "no pet policy".

Ask friends, relatives who are outside the evacuation area if they would be able to keep your pets.

Most animal shelters will be overburdened caring for the animals they already have so don't count on them to help.

Remember your pets will be nervous and may panic, hide or try to escape so use caution in handling them, if possible keep them crated.

If you are one of the citizens who will be evacuated by your local town or county call and ask what arrangements they have made for accommodating your pet.

Surviving a disaster takes planning and is the best way to assure everyone, including your furry loved ones, comes through unharmed.