

# Ask A Vet: Recent Wildfires, Flood, Tornadoes, and other Natural Disasters and the Animals Left Behind

*Sunday, September 20, 2015*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

In the last few weeks there have been so many natural disasters in the news - fires, tornadoes, and floods. Many thousands of people have been displaced from their homes and farms and their pets and livestock have suffered as well. How can we prepare for caring for our animals if something like that happens here in our community?

-Love My Critters

Dear Reader,

The news has been filled with natural disasters and the suffering has taken a huge toll for people and their animals. Sometimes there is enough prior warning for evacuation of animals in instances of impending fires and floods. Many times there is barely time for people to take shelter with their families, forcing them to leave pets, horses, other livestock to fend on their own.

In my practice life in our community I have cared for animals injured in tornadoes, high winds, barn fires, floods, trailer accidents, and collapsed barns due to heavy snow. Not only can animals be injured or killed in damaged buildings but secondary electrocution, wire cuts, disease, and road accidents after escaping from their housing, pens, and pasture fences take their toll. We are so blessed in this community in the way people come together to aid one another when disaster strikes - I have seen cows milked in their new barn while the debris pile from the barn fire was still smoldering.

Planning starts with familiarizing yourself with the types of disasters that can occur in your area and developing a plan of action for each type. Survey the surrounding area for the best place to confine your pets and livestock if their housing is destroyed. Plan for providing food and water if pumps and feed bins are out of service. If you have time to evacuate them - determine several locations they can be taken. Identify your dogs and cats with microchips or photographs, your livestock with ear tags, tattoos, freeze brands, photographs, or information on their halters beforehand. Getting animals reunited with their owners is a formidable task after a widespread natural disaster. This summer the elderly lady who found her dog alive in the rubble of a tornado on live TV brought many a happy tear to lots of eyes. Unfortunately many times pets and livestock are lost and never reunited with their owners.

Having your pets and livestock current on vaccinations can eliminate many disease problems that occur when they are rounded up and housed in close proximity after a disaster. Unvaccinated dogs sheltered after the recent storms suffered many life threatening and sometimes fatal cases of parvo virus. Volunteer veterinarians and animal care organizations care for many of the lost injured and sick animals. There are many heartwarming stories of tearful reunions tempering the stress of people who have lost everything in the storms.

Try to make plans ahead of these uncertainties that confront us from time to time and hopefully you won't need to implement them. Be ready to help those in need if they are the victims of disaster and remember their animal friends.

-Dr. Jerry Sellon