

# How to Include Pets in Your Family's Wildfire Evacuation Plan

**O**ur pets depend on us for their wellbeing all the time but they are especially dependent in an emergency situation, such as a call to evacuate your home during a wildfire. Including them in your family's disaster plan can make a life or death difference for them. The FEMA website offers clear advice concerning pets: "If you evacuate your home, do not leave your pets behind!"



By Bonney Brown

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, so many people risked their own lives to save their pets that the federal government now requires community emergency plans to include pets. However, resources are often stretched thin during a disaster, so we each need to have our own plan for evacuating with our pets.

- **Plan a place to go with your pets in advance.** If you have a friend or relative who will agree to welcome your pets, that's ideal, but there are also pet-friendly hotels and pet boarding facilities you could choose. You can also reach out to animal services to find out what accommodations they can provide for your animals in the event of an evacuation.
- **Prepare a go-bag of basic supplies for your pets.** This is especially important if your pet is on medications or is picky about their food.
- **Bring your dogs and cats indoors at the very first sign of a wildfire in your area.** Animals instinctively hide when they are frightened, and you want to be able to find your pets quickly. Even a calm pet may panic and try to run away, so be sure you have a secure pet carrier, leash or harness for each of your pets.
- **Be prepared to secure your animal for transport.** It can take time to get cats into carriers and dogs leashed up, especially when you are stressed, so don't wait for mandatory evacuations to get pets secured. You can help a nervous pet become acclimated to a carrier by leaving it out in the house and making it a cozy inviting place to go with soft bedding and an occasional treat inside.

If you have many smaller pets or just want to be ready to move quickly, you may want to consider Evacsacs – learn more at [www.evacpet.com](http://www.evacpet.com). You will need one for each animal. They are compact to store and can allow you to carry multiple animals at one time. You can create a homemade evacuation sack by putting rope through the casing of a pillow case and securing the draw string with a knot once your pet is inside.

- **Make sure pets can be ID'd:** Having identification on your animals is important in case you become separated. A tag on a collar is good, but a microchip is the most reliable identification for your pet. Washoe County Regional Animal Services offers low cost microchipping service for residents. Be sure your current phone number is on the tag or on file with the microchip company. Take a photo of each of your pets with your phone's camera as proof of ownership.

- **Share plan ahead of time:** Enlist a willing and trusted neighbor or friend to assist your pets in case you are not home when disaster strikes. This person should be familiar with your animals, your evacuation plan and have a key to your home.



Having a plan to safely evacuate your family, including your pets, will give you peace of mind and help ensure that everyone will be safe no matter what happens.

*Bonney Brown is Co-Founder and President of Humane Network. She created and sustained a 94% communitywide save rate as Executive Director for Nevada Humane Society, which had more than 10,000 annual animal admissions. And she was National No More Homeless Pets Director, COO and Communications Director for Best Friends Animal Society.*