Pets and Fire Safety: What You Can Do to Protect Your Pet

We all hope that unexpected disasters will never occur to us. However, most of us find ourselves dealing with the unexpected at various points in our lives. Some basic statistics may put things in perspective—over half a million pets in the US are affected by house fires each year and a devastating 40,000 pets are killed. Being prepared can save your pet’s life.

Tips for Cat People

Being able to locate your cat is critical in an emergency. Cats don’t usually come when you call, so you will need to know where yours hides when it is stressed and scared. Watch your cat to see where it goes when you turn on the vacuum cleaner, when strangers come to visit, or when you test your smoke alarm. Wherever your cat goes in these moments is likely where you will find it in the event of a fire.

The first objective in a house fire is to get yourself to safety, but if you do have time to get your cat, be prepared. Learn to grab your cat by the scruff of the neck. This means latching on to the loose skin directly at the back of your cat’s neck. This will allow you to carry it without getting bitten. Once you’ve grabbed the cat, a pillowcase makes a great emergency carrier if you don’t happen to have a cat carrier available.

Keep in mind, as well, that cats may run out of the house during an emergency. Be prepared by having ID tags on your cat’s collar as well as having your cat micro-chipped. It may also help if your neighbors are familiar with your cat and know its name. Only two percent of cats brought to rescue facilities are ever reunited with their owners. The more you can do to help facilitate a reunion with your feline friend, the better!

Tips for Dog People

It is also important that your neighbors know your dog’s name. If the dog is loose in the neighborhood, it will respond better to someone who knows its name. Another good reason for your neighbors to know your dog’s name is to assist emergency responders. If the firefighters get your dog’s name from neighbors it can help them interact with your dog and calm it down.

Of course, all dogs should be taught to come when called. In case of fire, a solid recall command can be a lifesaver. The key is to practice calling your dog and reward the response. Make a point of expecting your dog to always come when called and keep these interactions positive. It’s important that the dog learns that coming to you means coming to a positive experience and not just going to the vet or leaving someplace fun like the park. Once your dog’s response to coming when commanded is consistent, you’ll want to train under distracting circumstances, too. You will be glad you did should you ever need to persuade your dog to follow you through smoke, noise and flashing lights.

Tips for Wildfires

House fires are not the only fires to consider. Wildfires and forest fires happen and sometimes you do not get much notice when it comes to evacuating. If you happen to see a forest or wild fire call 911 and report it, never assume that someone else has already done it. You should also have an evacuation plan ready (kit should include copies of all valuable papers, mementos, pet information, etc.).

Before the fire approaches your home:

1. Have an escape route — have more than one way out of your home and off your property and practice with your pets.
2. Know your pets’ hiding places — this is where pets are most likely to be when they get scared.
3. Secure your pet — always evacuate your pet on a leash or in a carrier, in case they panic and run outside.
4. Prepare emergency kits for your pet — include food, water, bowls, cat litter & pan, medications or prescriptions and vet paperwork. Also include a photo of your pets in case they get lost, shot records, proof of ownership.
5. Display window stickers — pet stickers will alert rescue workers of the pets your home.
6. Consider investing in a pet fire alert collar — this innovative product works together with your home smoke detector and allows you to locate your pet as the collar flashes and sounds off when your smoke detector goes off.

Protecting your pets from fire is important. Include them in your family disaster plan and have an evacuation kit for them. Don’t leave your pets. Arrange for a safe place for them to stay. And don’t forget the most simple safety tip of all. Make sure your smoke alarm works. Early notification can save lives.

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