

## PROTECT YOUR PETS IN HURRICANE SEASON



By Elizabeth Chandler

Hurricanes ... not something we want to think about, but something we definitely should plan for, for the sake of our pets. After Charlie hit Florida in 2004, and Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, we cannot pretend that these events aren't going to happen and our pets depend on us to make sure they are safe during these events.

As a Florida resident, I remember in my frenzied preparation for Charlie, trying to figure out how to get all of my pets into my safe room, the bathroom. I had 7 dogs, 11 cats and a very small bathroom. In addition, a friend of mine who lives on Sarasota Bay evacuated to my house with her cats and birds, so it was like those old college games where you try to cram as many people as possible into a phone booth, only not as funny. Well, I guess it was sort of funny. There was much chaos as we shoved cats into crates trying to figure out how best to stack them in the tub, dragged mattresses to and fro for the best protective use, and moved furniture and dog crates around in an attempt to form some sort of fortress that presumably a Category 5 hurricane would not be able to penetrate.

Even if you don't want to prepare for yourself, it is your responsibility as a pet owner to take every precaution to ensure the safety of your pet. Many pets were displaced and lost as a result of hurricane Charlie in 2004, and many, many more died unnecessarily in Katrina in 2005, because the people in the area where hurricanes hit were largely unprepared for a direct hit. Besides, there seems to be some cosmic law that invokes to prevent an event from happening when you prepare for it in advance. Regardless of whether or not I'm right about that cosmic law, here are things you can do now that will promote your pet's safety in the event of a direct hit.

**1. If you evacuate, take your pet(s) with you.** If you are ordered to evacuate, then evacuate – **with your pet**. Many shelters now accept pets if you contain them in crates, so have a crate for each of your pets. Also, most hotels will accept pets during emergency situations. There's really no excuse to stay behind and endanger your pet because you want to prove something. If you must stay, at least evacuate your pet to a safe facility (be sure to leave proper next-of-kin documentation). As most experts have agreed, though, if you haven't evacuated by the time the hurricane is starting its approach, **DO NOT** try to evacuate at that time. Trying to outrun a hurricane is insane and leads to pure panic and direct endangerment of yourself and your pet.

**2. If you stay, secure your pet(s).** Have a crate on hand for your cat and/or small dog and use a waterproof marker to write your name, address, and phone number on the crate. Crates that are big enough for large dogs will not likely fit in your safe room, so leashing them securely (I use harnesses for my large dogs, because I don't feel that neck collars are sufficient to secure them) and keeping them very close to you in the safe room is your best bet.

**Other important things to do:**

1. If you evacuate, be sure to take plenty of food and water for your pet, as well as your pet's vaccine records. Also, keep your pet crated or leashed at all times. Store dry pet food in water-safe containers and have a manual can opener on hand for canned food.

2. Get your cat and/or dog micro-chipped well in advance of hurricane season for more reliable identification should you become separated from each other. Your vet can do this for you.

3. Give your dog a good potty break well before the storm hits. If there are high winds and heavy rain, falling branches and electrical wires are a real danger to your pet, as well as to you. Keep your dog on leash and under close supervision after the storm passes to protect it from hazards, including displaced alligators, snakes, and floating fire ants.

4. Try to remain calm. Hard as that might seem, your pets will very likely be stressed out from the situation as well as from the dropping barometric pressure, so move slowly and methodically (unlike what I did when Charlie passed this way). One way to do this is to be prepared in advance. Another way to manage your hurricane stress is to have plenty of Häagen Dazs Chocolate Chocolate Chip ice cream on hand (for you, not your pet). That way, when the power fails, you have to eat it all at once!

Hurricanes are an unpleasant fact of life in the Southern states and the East coast. But we have been weathering hurricanes for a long time, so it shouldn't be something that continues to take us by surprise. Be pro-active and protect your pet with proper planning and preparation.