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When a hurricane is blowing in, Florida residents know firsthand how to be prepared and ready for almost anything the wind and rain brings in.

That family preparedness needs to also include your pets.

As the saying goes, prepare for the worst and make sure your pets are included in those plans.

Leaving your pets behind to fend for themselves should not be in that plan. Instead, plan ahead and map out safe havens which accept pets. Research local shelter policies and contact your veterinarian for emergency facilities which do accept pets.

Don't wait for a mandatory evacuation order. Some people who have waited were told to leave their pet behind.

If evacuation is required by authorities, plans of lodging outside the area need to be made. Research the surrounding areas for hotels, shelters or any other lodging - which can include friends and relative - in which an extended stay can happen with your pets.

Now that plans are made for lodging and shelter which accepts pets, have your emergency caretaker's number handy, in case you are not home. This trustworthy individual will have access to your home and knows the plan of taking care of your animals.

Always have an emergency kit made up for hurricanes, which can result in long periods of time without water or power. Your pets also need their own emergency kits, as well.

Extra water specifically for your animals is the No. 1 and most important item in your pets' emergency kit. A week's worth of water for you, your family and pets is highly recommended.

Wet food is also important, because canned items last longer and the moisture in the food will help extend your pets' water rations. Don't forget to have a can opener handy, as well.

Have an extra supply of your pets' medications in advance by talking to your vet and securing extra prescriptions in case of an extended evacuation. Extra cat litter and doggy bags will be needed to stay sanitary and lessen the chances of spreading diseases.

When arriving at a potential shelter, boarding your pet maybe required. Having papers, proof of recent vaccinations, photos of your pet and proof of ownership, in a water-sealed container will eliminate much hassle in boarding a pet at a shelter. Also have ID tags and vaccination tags on your pets' collar.

For more convenient mobility, always have a supply of leashes and pet carriers handy. These will be a big help in your pets' safety or prevent them from running into harmful conditions.

Finally, always have your pets' favorite toys and items which will help calm them down. Anything to take the stress off your pets during a frightening time, can take stress off you.

Thinking ahead of the storm season is also a way to take pressure off when the wind starts whipping.

Having your pet microchipped is important, simply because your chances of being reunited with a lost pet goes up twofold if they can be scanned and identified. Adding stickers to your windows allows rescuers know there are animals which live there.

Have your pets vaccinated well in advance, because in the aftermath of a hurricane, diseases are more prevalent due to the flooding which causes sanitary problems.

Not all pets are dogs or cats.

For birds, they should have a secure cage.

A blanket over the cage may help reduce the stress of traveling. Also a spray bottle to moisten your bird's feathers in warm weather will be needed.

Be sure to have plenty of liners for the cage and a perch for the bird to grasp. Reptiles need secure housing. Snakes need a sturdy bowl that is large enough to soak in and it may be good to bring along a heating pad or other warming device.

Lizards can be transported like birds. Other small animals such as hamsters and mice can be transported in a secure carrier with bedding materials, food and food bowls. Remember to have an extra water bottle and a week's worth of bedding.

For more information and a detailed list of disaster preparedness go to aspca.org.

Having a plan in place and executing that plan, will only make a very unstable situation go more smoothly. Your family and pets will be the better for it.