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# Emergency Preparedness

## Are you ready?

It's that time of year again, the wind starts to blow, the sky turns a funny shade of green and the radio tells us that there is a tornado warning in effect. It isn't funny, it's scary. Mother nature is not to be messed with.

Recently at a US hospital directors retreat, we went through an exercise on disaster preparedness. We Canadians were wide eyed with wonder at how our U.S. counterparts, especially those from Florida, moved with relative ease through things like moving pets to the top cages in case of flood, reviewing insurance policies for appropriate coverage and dealing with claims. It was all very run of the mill as they had been through it all time and again.

### How Would Your Clinic React?

This past year or so has brought more natural disasters than ever before. There have been tropical storms, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and floods. These natural disasters seem worlds away. What could possibly happen to us here in Canada?

Although our environmental and human error associated disaster risks here are very different than the rest of the world, we need to consider the following: blizzards, ice storms, train derailments, plane crashes, chemical spills, power outages, nuclear reactors, terrorism, forest fires – and of course, tornados. Disasters can strike anywhere, anytime. Many times they happen without

any warning or time to prepare. We must be ready and rehearsed in advance, for our families and for our businesses.

Survivors indicate that confusion is the first response in the aftermath of a disaster – and they comment on how scary it is not knowing exactly what to do, or when help will arrive. Emergency workers are often caught in the disaster too, and have hundreds of calls to respond to at once.

Our recovery rate from disasters depends largely on our level of preparedness. Emergency response teams recommend that we be prepared to be self-sufficient at home or in a business for 72 hours following a disaster.

Anxiety will be running high – just knowing where to go, what to do, and that there is an emergency kit with enough supplies for 72 hours lessens the anxiety for all involved.

### What Exactly Does Self-Sufficient Mean?

For starters, have one clearly labeled, waterproof container that is easily located. Make sure that it contains non-perishable food items, a can opener, water, any necessary medications, blankets, a battery operated or wind up radio, flash lights, batteries, first aid kit, instructions with a place to meet if separated, list of family or staff members, clients to contact etc.

Nowhere was all this more evident than during 911, the tsunamis and in the

floods of New Orleans. Many of us could only watch from far away as we saw people go through horrible conditions for days in make-shift shelters, screaming out for water, food and life saving medications such as insulin. They were desperate for help to put their lives back together and find family members. It was devastating.

We need to have an emergency preparedness plan for our clinics, our homes and our families. We need to familiarize ourselves with our community, and be aware of potential hazards in the areas of our hospitals.

Although your neighbours and friends might think you are nuts, watch for sales on bottled water and pick up a couple of cases to get you started. Formulate a plan for your business and home that indicates a safe area to go to in severe weather, determine what to do about long term power outages i.e. back up hospital power, generators.

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Don't forget to discuss escape routes for people and pets. Make arrangements for temporary safe containment for pets. Remember to secure pets in carriers or on leashes, tag them for identification, and bring along food, water and medications. If large animals are involved, evacuate them to the planned area and supply food and water.

At the very least, add a section on emergency preparedness to your policy and procedures manual indicating where your staff will meet, what is to be done with an-

imals, and where emergency supplies are stored. Form a partnership with your local shelter or a farm so that in an emergency you may transport pets to the location for temporary holding.

Walk through the plan you develop, conduct a drill – much like those fire drills you walked through as a school kid. It's great to go to the lengths of making a disaster plan, but if no one knows about it, or that you have set up an emergency supplies kit, then all your work will be for naught.

Check with your local fire or emergency services department to help you make an emergency preparedness plan. Many have checklists to help you set up your kit. Check with your insurance providers and know your coverage. Understand that in times of disaster, often several people or work places will be affected. Be prepared!

It is likely that many involved will find themselves looking for leadership and someone who knows what to do or how to handle the circumstances. Unfortunately, many will be left waiting for help. Which will you be?

Emergency Services officers suggest having a floor plan of your home or clinic showing locations of things like first aid kits, location of compressed gas, controlled substances, shut off valves, fire extinguishers, and locations of emergency supplies or disaster kits. 🐾

## tidbits >

### The Lure of the Wild

More than 60 percent of people with pet birds also feed wild birds, according to a survey by the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association. Here's what they offer those wild birds:

<b>Food sold for wild birds</b>	86 %
<b>Bread</b>	39 %
<b>Food sold for pet birds</b>	22 %
<b>Other</b>	11 %



### Sunblock for your pet? You bet!

The risks of overexposure to the sun can be a problem for many dogs. Unfortunately, dogs can develop a wide variety of sun-associated problems beyond sunburn just as humans can. Repetitive sun exposure can lead to chronic skin changes and sun-induced skin cancer. Animals most at risk for sun-caused skin disease and cancer are those with short, white coats, light-colored skin and sparse tummy fur. Breeds that fit these characteristics include Dalmatians, bull terriers, Staffordshire bull terriers, whippets, Italian greyhounds and greyhounds. The more sun, the greater the risk; dogs who like to sunbathe and are permitted to do so are at the greatest risk.

Skin cancer can hit dogs as young as 4 years old, which is why prevention is extremely important. Decreasing exposure is the only way to protect an animal from sun-related problems. Preventing sunbathing, having roofs over outdoor runs and using solar protective T-shirts or dog shirts can be very helpful. Waterproof pediatric or children's sunscreens are recommended for use. Sunscreens designed for children are less likely to be irritating and commonly do not have scents added. 🐾



## quick links >

Below are some quick links to AVMA sites for disaster response to get you started:

- [http://www.avma.org/disaster/saving\\_family](http://www.avma.org/disaster/saving_family)
- <http://www.avma.org/disaster/responseguide>