What to Do During an Emergency: A Clear Guide for Pet Owners

Emergencies don’t wait and neither should your plan. In cases of a natural disaster, house fire, or sudden medical emergency, pet parents must be ready to act fast and smart. This guide is specifically for what to do during the emergency, not before or after. That means immediate action when seconds count and confusion can cost lives.

1. Grab the Pet Emergency Go-Bag (If It’s Safe)

If your pet’s emergency kit is within easy reach and conditions allow, grab it. This should include:

• Leash or carrier

• Medications (labeled)

• Water and collapsible bowl

• Copies of medical records

• A recent photo of your pet

• Comfort item (small toy or blanket)

⛔ Do NOT delay evacuating just to pack supplies. Life comes first.

2. Secure Your Pet Immediately

Pets panic in emergencies. Dogs may bolt, cats may hide. Here’s how to secure them quickly:

• Cats: Keep a pillowcase or soft bag near exits, you can safely transport a cat in it short-term if no carrier is nearby. Do not chase; coax with calm voice and food.

• Dogs: Leash them right away. Even calm dogs can run if scared.

• Small pets (rabbits, birds, reptiles): Use a ventilated, secure box or their habitat if portable. Secure all latches.

Pro Tip: Keep carriers and leashes near exits, not tucked in closets.

3. Evacuate or Shelter In Place – Know Which

🏃‍♀️ Evacuating?

• Bring your pet—NEVER leave pets behind. If it’s unsafe for you, it’s unsafe for them.

• Know where to go: Not all shelters or hotels accept pets. Use apps like BringFido or check your city’s emergency plan.

🏠 Sheltering in place?

• Move pets to a quiet, interior room without windows (bathrooms work well).

• Close off crawl spaces or hideouts where pets can become trapped.

• Set up a safe space with food, water, litter box (for cats), and bedding.

4. Communicate Clearly With First Responders

If fire or rescue teams are involved, tell them immediately that there are pets inside—what kind, how many, and where they were last seen.

Stick a “Pet Inside” emergency sticker near doors in advance, but if responders arrive during the emergency, verbal communication is critical.

5. If Separated, Act Fast

If your pet bolts or is left behind:

• Notify animal control and shelters ASAP with a description and photo.

• Use pet microchip services to mark them as lost.

• Leave out familiar items (a worn shirt, food) near your home—pets often return to scent.

6. Emergency Medical Needs

If your pet is injured during the emergency:

• Control bleeding with clean gauze or cloth.

• Don’t give human medications.

• Transport to an emergency vet only when safe to do so, call ahead to ensure they’re open and equipped.

In summary

Emergencies are chaotic. Your pet relies entirely on you for their safety. Being calm, fast, and clear-headed can make all the difference. Practice quick exits with your pet, know your shelter options, and above all, never assume you’ll “have time” to think later.

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