

# Disaster Preparedness for Veterinary Practices



are you prepared to continue practicing  
in the aftermath of a disaster?

disaster preparedness  
*series*



## Are you prepared to continue practicing in the aftermath of a disaster?

### Disasters can occur at any time, in any place.

What would you do to continue practicing veterinary medicine, to continue paying your staff, and to communicate with your clients? If you do not prepare now for what you will do in a disaster, then the disaster will dictate the outcome of your business—possibly the outcome of your life.

## It is essential that a veterinary practice have a written disaster plan that includes

### 1) Emergency Relocation of animals

### 2) Medical Record back-up

### 3) Continuity of Operations

### 4) Security

### 5) General emergency planning

### 6) Fire prevention

### 7) Insurance and Legal issues

Information about each of these criteria is listed below.

Many private companies now exist that can help you formulate disaster plans, including maintaining business continuity in the face of disaster. A simple internet search for business continuity planning is recommended if you would like additional information on this specific topic.



## Your written disaster plan should include:

### 1) Emergency relocation of boarded or hospitalized animals

- Leashes, carriers and other species specific supplies
- Appropriate, pre-arranged animal transportation
- Temporary animal holding location
- 24-hour client contact list (off-site access)
- Secure and weather-resistant patient identification
- In conjunction with appropriate legal council; involving your staff, clients and their pets in disaster planning and disaster drills can help ensure community buy-in and dedication to the plan

### 2) Medical record back-up

- Off-site computer back-up (*fireproof safes will not prevent melting*)
- Off-site copies of important documents
- Itemized inventory (*on-site & off-site*)
- Digital storage

### 3) Continuity of operations

- Communications (*do not rely on landlines, cell phones or pagers*)
- Alternate power source (*i.e. generators with regular maintenance and training for staff; ideally professionally installed and able to provide long-term power to the entire facility*)
- Generator fuel source
- Continued refrigeration
- List of suppliers with current 24-hour contact information
- Alternate food and water sources in case of contamination
- 5-7 days worth of food and water for on-site staff and patients
- 5-7 days of personal medications for on-site staff
- Alternate Practice Location (*within your vicinity*)
  - Contact your local and state Veterinary Medical Association for potential resources
  - Yours may be the only practice affected in area (*i.e. hospital fire*)
  - No inconvenience to your clients
  - Eliminate a need for your clients to obtain services elsewhere
- Adopt a Sister Practice (*outside your vicinity*)
  - Contact your local and state Veterinary Medical Association for potential resources
  - Many practices in your area affected
  - Avoid a gap in client services

## Your written disaster plan



- Pay the sister practice a percentage of your income for the use of their facility
- Setup a reciprocal arrangement
- Practice disaster drills together uniting two communities that may not have otherwise communicated

### 4) Security of building and personnel

- Contact state/local municipality for specific requirements
- Outline preferred means of reporting emergencies, including designated person for communicating with local emergency responders
- Local fire department: free inspection and evacuation drills
- Water system independent from electrical system
- Oxygen tanks isolated for safety
- Secure practice from theft, looting, and other crimes
- Floor plan or diagram that clearly shows the location of all fire extinguishers, control valves, dangerous areas, and escape routes
- Emergency lighting
- Multiple exits
- Regular disaster/evacuation drills (*local fire department, local police, clients*)
- Office phone-tree (24-hour numbers)
- Pre-arranged off-site meeting location for staff and account for all employees
- Pre-arranged conference call capability to keep all staff informed
- Encourage and help to develop each employee's personal family disaster plan (*if they are prepared at home they will be better able to assist the practice*)
- Hazardous Materials inventory with Material Safety Data Sheets (*accessible off-site*)
- Employee identification cards (*access to disaster stricken area*)
- First-aid training for employees in each work shift in the practice

## Your written disaster plan



### 5) General Emergency Planning

- Plan should address appropriate responses to all foreseeable emergencies, including hazardous chemical spills
- Employees must receive any training, information and equipment required by a response plan
- Proper housekeeping includes maintenance of equipment, surveillance and detection of leaks, containment of spills by trained employees wearing protective clothing, and proper disposal
- Contact their state's respective occupational safety agency to ensure full compliance of both federal and state regulations

### 6) Fire prevention

- Identify major fire hazards in the workplace, proper handling and storage procedures, potential ignition sources (*e.g., open flames and electrical sparks*) and type of fire protection equipment necessary to control each major hazard
- Procedures to control accumulations of flammable and combustible waste materials
- Procedures for regular maintenance of safeguards installed on heat-producing equipment
- Name of job title of employees responsible for maintaining equipment to prevent or control sources of ignition or fires

### 7) Insurance coverage and legal issues

- Current and comprehensive insurance policy
- Discuss the details of disaster drills with your legal counsel to make sure you are covered for any injuries that might occur during the drill
- Receipts for all purchases
- Videotape and photograph inventory

## Your written disaster plan

- In the event the practice is damaged, it is important to take measures to avoid further damage (i.e. – If a practice's roof is damaged in a disaster, but the contents in the building are ruined because of subsequent rains, your possessions may not be covered by your insurance policy if the rain is deemed "after the initial disaster" and you did not take steps to secure a tarp over the top of your building preventing further damage).
- Familiarize yourself with tax laws and deductible disaster expenses
- Business Owners Policy, AVMA PLIT, 800-228-PLIT, [www.avmaplit.com](http://www.avmaplit.com)
- Make sure your insurance coverage addresses:
  - Business Interruption (*continuing expenses*) – find out exactly when it ends and what triggers the end
  - Extra Expense (*payment of overtime pay and relocation expenses*)
  - Professional Extension (*provides coverage for injury/loss/death of animal in a practice's care, custody or control. Normal professional liability only provides coverage during a case of treatment*)
  - Loss of Income
  - Large animal and equine practitioners should consider "mobile loss of income" (which provides coverage in case a piece of equipment or vehicle cannot be used)
  - Personal Property (*replacement value*)
  - Automatic Inflation
  - Fire Damage (*typically included in business packages*)
  - Water Damage (*NOT typically covered in business packages—make sure you have flood insurance if you are in a flood zone*)
  - Debris Removal/Cleanup
  - Civil Ordinance Coverage (*provides coverage in case the practice is unable to function because of an act of government*)
  - Comprehensive building and structure replacement
  - Coverage of rented and leased equipment
  - Interruption of power, heating/air and sewer
  - Coverage of Worker's Compensation
  - General and professional liability



### American Veterinary Medical Foundation



Founded in 1963, the American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMF) is a 501(c)(3) organization that raises and disburses funds for initiatives supporting its mission statement, "Advancing the care of animals with an emphasis on disaster preparedness and response, and animal health studies." Contributions made to the AVMF are tax deductible. The AVMF Animal Disaster Relief and Response Fund provides support for emergency veterinary aid for the health, safety, and welfare of animals affected by disasters at the local level, emergency preparedness at the state level, and the Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams at the national level.

To contribute to the AVMF Animal Disaster Relief and Response Fund, please mail your check to:

AVMF Animal Disaster Relief and Response Fund  
Department 20-1122  
P.O. Box 5940  
Carol Stream, IL 60197-5940  
Or call: 847-285-6689  
[www.avmf.org](http://www.avmf.org)



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## **Additional Information Available from:**

### **AVMA**

[www.avma.org/disaster](http://www.avma.org/disaster)

### **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

Disaster Impact Helpline 800-462-9029

[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

### **Occupational Safety & Health Administration**

[www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

### **Small Business Administration**

Disaster Loans 800-488-5323

[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

[www.sba.gov/disaster](http://www.sba.gov/disaster)

### **The American Red Cross**

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

### **Internal Revenue Services**

Tax assistance

[www.irs.ustreas.gov/pas/disaster/default.htm](http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/pas/disaster/default.htm)

### **Farm Service Agency**

Farm assistance

[www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/disaster/default.htm](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/disaster/default.htm)

### **Social Security Administration**

Social Security benefits

[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

### **Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans benefits

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

*(Revised 08/08)*