Pets should be part of evacuation plans

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bring their pets—died during Hur- ricane Katrina, which struck the gulf coast of the U.S. in August 2005—left many residents without a home and one of the few dead- lusts in the hurricane’s trajectory. Veterinarian Dr. Meredith A. Steudle, of the state Department of Agriculture, said 10,000 pets died as a result of Katrina. “Now we know people refuse to leave and human lives were lost as a result of that,” she said. Plotting the number of presentations around the county and after disasters, she had many people have pets. She asked participants in the conference how many had pets. Most in att- tendance raised their hands. “How many people would leave your pet at home if you had to leave in an emergency like that?” she asked. No one raised their hand. During Katrina, many evacu- ated but returned to their homes too soon to check on their pets, Steudle said, increasing the risk to them and fi rst responders. She recom- mended familiarizing pets with their license that indicates they are current with their in- structions, veterinary contacts, microchip number, cleaning supplies, a muzzle and first-aid items. “If you go to a CART shelter and take your pet and they are not current on their rabies, they have to actually isolate them and put them somewhere else in the shelter,” Steudle said. “It’s not always a straight- through process.” She recommended bringing pets to a CART shelter in a carrier. “If your pet hasn’t left your house in 15 years, trying to get them in a carrier and taking them out will be stressful. Pets are not just have to be part of evacuation plans,” she said. “The bottom line is, take your pet with you, do not leave them.”

Steudle recommended a go bag for pets with items such as a two-week supply of food and water, a collar, leash, identification, including a tag, a picture, medication, proof of ownership, microchip number, cleaning supplies, a muzzle and first-aid items. “If your pet hasn’t left your house in 15 years, trying to get them in a carrier and taking them out will be stressful. Pets are not just house pets. They need to be part of evacuation plans,” she said. “The bottom line is, take your pet with you, do not leave them.”

Steudle recommended preparing ahead where pets will be sheltered during an emergency evacuation. Options include pet-friendly motels, animal shelters that are allowed in the human side of the shelter, family and friends, not support neighborhood animals, veterinarians, or county animal shelters. With a CART, there may be a human side of a shelter and an animal side of the shelter or pets may be kept at a different site, Steudle said. “The biggest thing is that are allowed in the human side of the shelter that are not support companion animals, not pets,” Steudle said. “Humane societies and animal shelters are another option,” she said. “And if you don’t have a go bag, go to your nearest veterinary hospital or vet office in that area.”

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