



TEXAS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

# CLINIC DISASTER PLAN



**DR. JOHN SCOTT SHARES**  
 HIS PROTOCOL FOR HURRICANE  
 PREPAREDNESS...

At the beginning of storm season, I order a year's supply of acepromazine and cardboard cat carriers (both commonly requested by clients evacuating with pets). At home, I fill some good airtight gas cans with "evacuation gasoline" usually 20 to 25 gallons. If a storm threatens, we stop taking in boarders. I always advise clients to evacuate and take their pets with them. You do have to make plans for any boarders that you might get stuck with, like clients on overseas vacations. Be prepared to evacuate them yourself. (It happens!) We make arrangements to transfer any ill patients and avoid scheduling any surgeries that might require follow up.

Communication with employees about their plans is crucial. No employees are required to stay at work—they make their own decisions. If my family and I evacuate, I make sure to take a computer backup of all important files, as well as any expensive drugs, controlled drugs or refrigerated vaccines. And you don't want to forget about deceased animals in your freezer—try to have them picked up before you evacuate.

At the end of storm season, if you have not had to use your evacuation gasoline, use it in your vehicle and say a prayer of thanks!

Hurricane damage to a Galveston veterinary clinic. Photos courtesy of Dr. Ken Diestler



# Think it won't happen to you? Depending on your location, you may routinely think about hurricanes, wildfires or winter weather. But what if...

- A natural gas leak forced you to evacuate your patients and staff?
- A tornado destroyed a nearby colleague's practice?
- Pandemic influenza kept all your employees home sick?
- An electrical fire destroyed your clinic?
- Water from a broken pipe flooded your building?



**A** disaster, large or small, can impact any business when least expected. Sometimes small businesses are most vulnerable to the economic impact of a disaster. While we all like to think that bad things won't happen to us, some simple planning could mean the difference between your business surviving and being wiped out by an unexpected event. In addition, you can make a difference among your employees, clients and community by promoting disaster planning and leading by example.

This handy document is a tool to get you started with your clinic disaster plan. It can be used as a simple fill-in-the-blank plan that should not take long to complete. Once you're done, you can use it like a folder—tuck some copies of crucial documents inside and you'll be ready to go! We recommend you make a second copy and store that in a remote location, possibly outside your immediate vicinity...just in case.

We also encourage you to foster relationships with your fellow veterinarians so that, should the worst occur, you may continue to operate by joining forces with a colleague. Ideally you would have a nearby "sister" clinic, as well as a clinic outside your immediate area, where you could take or send patients in an emergency. If the impact to your clinic is prolonged, you could even make financial arrangements to share their facility. Make sure to discuss these details ahead of time and inform your clients of the arrangements you make.

All disaster response starts locally. At the county level, your county judge is in charge. Many county judges have an emergency management coordinator. Find out who handles disasters in your county (check the county website) and also whether your county has an Animal Issues Committee.

## STAFF PREPAREDNESS

We feel it is important that all staff members are personally prepared for a disaster before they can assist the practice, its clients and patients. All staff members are encouraged to develop a personal disaster kit for the people and animals in their households. A basic kit contains supplies and essential documents, and is readily available should a disaster strike. Some examples of items in the disaster kit are a radio, flashlight, batteries, photos and/or a video of pets and property, medications and other basic supplies. You should always be prepared to take your pets with you in an evacuation by having appropriate means of transporting them.

## CONTACT LISTS

Staff members will keep current emergency contact information on file with the practice, updating it as necessary. A contact tree is attached to this plan and a copy should be stored off-site to ensure all staff members can be called if needed before or during a disaster. The practice owner or designated manager will establish the safety and status of each employee, determine who is able to assist the practice and assign duties.

**CLINIC NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

has prepared this disaster plan, in addition to the practice emergency evacuation and fire plans, to assist its staff members and clients during a disaster, as well as to ensure survival of the business. We are vulnerable to a variety of threats including natural and man-made events, severe weather, flooding and fire which could make it necessary to evacuate our practice, or to shelter-in-place and continue to provide essential care to the patients in our custody.

**IF A DISASTER OR SIGNIFICANT EVENT IMPACTS THE PRACTICE, STAFF MEMBERS WILL CALL:**

① **Name/Number – Practice Owner:**

\_\_\_\_\_

② **Name/Number – Other manager or emergency contact:**

\_\_\_\_\_

*If these two people cannot be reached or local communications are down, staff should contact*

③ **Name/Number – Contact outside immediate area:**

\_\_\_\_\_

All staff members must check in if physically able to do so. After initial contact, staff should check in daily or as needed until the crisis has passed.

**IMPORTANT CONTACTS**

*In an emergency, Dial 911.*

**Non-emergency phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Sheriff: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Animal Control: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Utilities:**

Gas: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Electric: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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**OTHER IMPORTANT CONTACTS**

**Alarm company:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Local Emergency Management Coordinator:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Local emergency animal hospital:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sister practice/alternate practice location in our vicinity:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

After hours contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sister practice/alternate practice location OUTSIDE our area:**

\_\_\_\_\_

After hours contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**Local VMA contact:**

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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**ADDITIONAL CONTACTS**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## INSURANCE

In order to preserve our practice and our livelihoods, we have the following insurance policies:

- Property Insurance  Flood Insurance  Liability Insurance
- Worker's compensation  Practice preservation  Special riders
- Other

Policies are kept at this location \_\_\_\_\_ with additional copies held off-site at \_\_\_\_\_.

Insurance policies are reviewed and updated annually. We have (circle one) videotaped OR created a photo album of the practice and its contents. The original photos/video is stored \_\_\_\_\_. A copy is kept off-site at \_\_\_\_\_.

## GENERAL PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

- Business continuity plan (can be assisted by a professional planner, or "do-it-yourself")
- Asset list with serial numbers, model numbers and replacement value
- Video or photos of practice and contents
- Computer back-up of records off-site
- Paper copies of fee schedule, other documents in case of power outage
- Emergency contact lists for staff and suppliers
- Written and posted policy for boarding and hospitalized patients that addresses emergencies and notifies clients of disaster plan details (where practice will evacuate to, contact information).
- Brochures about basic disaster preparedness and pet identification for clients
- Sign-off sheet for staff that have completed a personal disaster kit
- Training sign-off sheet for staff disaster plan and drills—monthly/quarterly/annual
- First aid/CPR employee training—for animals and humans

## EVACUATION CHECKLIST (When there's time to prepare):

- Ensure safe evacuation of all staff and animals
- Post easily visible contact information for clients if animals remain in your care
- Leave message or forward phones if possible directing clients to you
- Determine how the "all-clear" will be determined to return to the practice
- Windows and doors secured
- Loose items outdoors secured
- Flammable materials removed if possible
- Hazardous material labeled and secured
- Controlled substance secured or removed
- Cadaver freezer emptied
- Refrigerated inventory protected
- Notify alarm company
- Unplug electrical equipment
- Elevate expensive items subject to flooding
- Shut off electrical breakers, gas and water
- Other

## SHELTER-IN-PLACE CHECKLIST

- Store and rotate basic supplies such as non-perishable food and potable water for staff
- Store enough food/water and personal medications for any housed pets for 1 week
- Generator
- Cleaning supplies and dry goods
- Flashlights, weather radio, batteries
- Consider change of clothes and entertainment (games, etc)
- Safest place within the clinic to shelter:

## POST-DISASTER CHECKLIST

- Check safety and security of any people or animals. Check caging for integrity
- Personal protective equipment: rubber/canvas gloves, water-proof boots, eye protection, dust mask
- Assess damage to facility: videotape and photos
- Protect property from future damage to help ensure no problems with insurance coverage
- Contact insurance company BEFORE any clean-up or repairs
- Basic safety repairs done before resuming work
- Hire contractor for major repairs
- Crisis counseling/mental health support for employees and self

### Special considerations for hurricanes:

- Consider establishing a cut-off time for accepting boarders based on hurricane watch or warning criteria
- Have all boarding patients sign and receive a copy of the evacuation policy

### Special considerations for winter weather:

- Don't forget to protect outdoor pipes
- Have contingency plans for heat, blankets, etc.
- Discuss which staff may be able to work based on ease of access to the clinic if roads are affected

### Checklist of documents to include inside this packet:

- Insurance policies
- Staff emergency contact list/phone tree
- Contact list for crucial suppliers
- Evacuation diagram/plan

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This plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis or sooner as the need arises.

Practice Owner \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Congratulations! Now that you have a plan and you know how to use it,...take the next steps.**

Talk to your staff and clients. Make sure your clients know the clinic's plan, and that they have a personal disaster plan in place. Collect alternate phone numbers, possibly from outside your area, for each client in case they cannot be reached in an emergency.

*Update and train/exercise your plan at least once a year.*

**Don't forget:** preparedness is a never-ending cycle, not a one-time event. Involve your staff, discuss and update plans regularly, and try to consider every aspect of your business. For more comprehensive and easy-to-use guidance on continuity of business operations plans, evacuation planning, crisis communication plans and more, visit [ready.gov/business](http://ready.gov/business)

**For reference material on personal planning for your staff and clients, visit:**  
[tvma.org](http://tvma.org)  
[avma.org/disaster](http://avma.org/disaster)  
[ready.gov](http://ready.gov)