

Friday, May 16, 2008

Bronson Says Planning for Pets in Disasters Should Begin Now

Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson is encouraging people to plan ahead for their animals in the event of a wildfire, hurricane or other disaster. Bronson says citizens should not wait until the last minute to think about how they are going to deal with pets and other animals during an evacuation or in a power outage. Evacuations during the ongoing wildfires have shown how quickly people may need to leave their homes, and hurricane season starts in just a few weeks.

People should not leave their pets behind when they evacuate because the animals can easily be injured, lost or killed. Owners should find out now if any local boarding facilities or veterinary offices can shelter their animals in an emergency. They should also contact hotels outside their immediate area to determine which allow animals and whether there are any size restrictions.

Bronson's Division of Animal Industry website www.doacs.state.fl.us/ai (click on "Emergency Management") provides information about some pet-friendly hotels, pet-friendly emergency shelters, and extensive emergency preparedness information for owners of large and small animals who may be impacted by a disaster. If a family plans to go to a public shelter, they should check with county officials on the location of the nearest pet-friendly shelter.

"Experience has shown that people who wait until too late to prepare may put themselves in harm's way because they refuse to heed evacuation orders, or the animals are left behind to fend for themselves," Bronson said. "Pet and livestock owners should have an emergency preparedness plan for their animals just as they do for their families."

Some tips for people with animals include:

Pets and small animal safety

- Keep ID tags and vaccinations up to date.
- When evacuating, bring proper identification and health papers with you.
- Prepare a pet evacuation kit, including food and water for one week, a manual can opener, medications, medical/vaccination records, a pet carrier, and bedding. If evacuated, properly secure animals in the vehicle.
- If you plan to board a pet, make written arrangements in advance.
- Contact hotels and motels along your evacuation route to check policies on accepting pets and keep the list handy.

Horses and livestock

- Keep vaccinations and other health requirements up to date.

-- If possible, make arrangements in advance for evacuation of horses. Know where you can take your horses for shelter along your evacuation route.

-- Make sure your horse trailer is "ready to go" or other transport arrangements are prepared well in advance.

-- Carry your vaccination record, Coggins test and health papers with you as well as handling equipment.

-- Have a point of destination before departure and be sure to evacuate as soon as possible to avoid traffic delays.

If evacuation is not possible

-- Reinforce your barn, and outbuildings with hurricane straps and other measures.

-- Open gates or remove fencing so that animals may move to high ground in a flood and to low-lying areas during high winds.

-- Install a hand pump and obtain enough large containers to water your animals for at least a week.

-- Identify alternate water and power sources. A generator with a safely stored supply of fuel may be essential, especially if you have electrical equipment necessary to the well being of your animals.

-- Secure or remove anything that could become blowing debris.

"Having a pet plan in place will provide people with one less worry when they are getting ready for a storm or other emergency," Bronson said. "We have seen many animals separated from their families during disasters and it's important to take steps to prevent this from happening."