



12 DAYS OF CRITTER PREPAREDNESS

© By Jo Becker

It's not a matter of if but when a personal emergency, localized incident (perhaps a winter storm or power outage), or large-scale disaster strikes. Of course, animals – great and small – face the same hazards that befall us.

This Christmas, gift yourself and your furry or feather friends with the peace of mind that comes with taking practical, proactive steps to prepare for, survive, and go on to thrive after a disaster. You might even choose to make it an annual family tradition to restock and incrementally add to your emergency supplies each winter.

DAY 1: WATER

Observe how much your pooch, parrot, or pony consumes in an average day. Multiple that by the number of days you wish to prepare for (a minimum of three to seven is recommended). Factor in a little extra for routine bathing and cleaning, as well as water that might be needed to wash chemicals or contaminants from your furbaby's coat.

THINK REDUNDANCY by considering alternative water sources such as small, long-lasting pouches available from emergency supply vendors, purification tablets, bleach solutions, filters, etc. as well as storing a stash of water in stable bottles.

GET STARTED by picking up at least one or two bottles at your next trip to the grocery store. If cost is a concern, sterilize used water (not milk or fruit juice) bottles and fill them with tap water or, if you're unable to purchase all of your water supplies at once, set yourself a schedule to systematically stock up over the weeks or months to come based on your budget. Put this schedule in your calendar for next year to pace it out over various paychecks if you need to and to keep the process top-of-mind throughout the year. Along the way, keep a lookout for sales on cases of water or the filtration system you prefer.

DAY 2: FOOD AND MEDICINE

Repeat the process above to determine how much pet food, livestock feed, and medication you need to stockpile for your critters based, again, on the number of days you intend to prepare for.

GET STARTED. This can be daunting both in terms of cost, storage, and the need to rotate supplies so they don't go bad over time. However, don't let that discourage you from starting. Start small with a three-day supply and build up from there over time. For example, aim for gather that three-day supply of food and medicine over the next several weeks or months and then perhaps next year you'll aim to add an additional two to three days' worth of additional provisions to it. Whatever plan feels realistic for you, pen those into next year's calendar. Ask your veterinarian for extra written prescriptions for your emergency go-bag.

DAY 3: FOOD TOOLS

Collect what you need to go with the food and water you're planning for your critters. Think bowls for household pets (consider the pros and cons of disposable vs. durable, collapsible, etc.) and troughs for livestock. If you have cans, do they have self-opening tabs or will you need a can opener for your emergency supply kit? Of course you'll want to avoid any leftovers going bad; what baggies or storage containers might you need?

GET STARTED by raiding cupboards and drawers before heading to your local dollar store for supplies. If there are any items you don't have and can't afford immediately, contemplate how and when you'll save up for it and add that to your calendar.

DAY 4: DEALING WITH ELIMINATION

We've dealt with what goes in; don't neglect what comes out the other end. Depending on the critters you have, you might need pee pads, litter and a small box, sturdy trash bags, shavings, a shovel, etc.

GET STARTED by pilfering a few pee pads or a bit of litter or shavings from the supply you already have, if the prospect of buying a full supply at once is too much to think about or afford up front. Again, consider how much you can afford to squirrel away over the weeks or months to come and – you got it – add that to your calendar, too.

DAY 5: CONTAIN & TRANSPORT

Assure you have, get, or budget to buy what you'll need to contain and transport your critters if evacuation is required. That might be crates, cages, and carriers or, for larger animals, trailers and portable fencing.

GET STARTED by setting aside any extra equipment or supplies you already have such as collapsible crates or cages. Then list what you'll need to purchase and watch for great deals on used materials at garage sales and resell shops, sales at local retailers, or online sales. For many, bigger items such as trucks, trailers, and corral panels needed for livestock would require a determined savings strategy. Once again, plot out our plan and include it in your new year's calendar.

DAY 6: LODGING

This may be related to #5 above but pause to consider if your containment and transportation equipment is adequate if you needed to house your critters remotely for days, weeks, or longer. For example, a carrier might get you out the door with a small house pet but you'll want something larger that allowed the animal space to move around if away from home for an extended period. In the case of a cat or other box-trained critter you'd also need room enough to place a small litter box.

GET STARTED with the same suggestions listed above for Day 5. Of course, given the time of year, you might also venture to the mall to be sure Santa knows what's on your wish list (hey, it doesn't hurt to ask!).

Now that you have (or have a planned schedule for acquiring) the bare minimum on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, let's look now at some prep. steps that cost little to nothing!

DAY 7: ESCAPE PLAN

The most common disaster that kills more people, household pets, and livestock than any other is home and barn fires. Firefighters recommend designating two ways out of each room in your home (and by extension, barn, if you have livestock).

Mull over any challenges your household face may face. Does anyone have a sight, hearing, or mobility challenge? Is it a multi-story structure? How can you increase the odds of household pets being nearby and ready to go? How could you be alerted to a barn fire while inside your home?

As you practice each month, schedule time afterward to discuss such issues and brainstorm creative solutions as well as any tools that might be useful such as a visible smoke alarm, escape ladder, or Evacsak® (learn more about the Evacsak at JoBecker.weebly.com/resources.html).

GET STARTED by taking time now to consider how everyone – kids, elders, those with disabilities, and your critters – might escape a fire. Take out that calendar and pen in practice dates each month. When the time comes, make it realistic – turn out the lights; close your eyes (you won't be able to keep them open against smoke in a real fire); and get down low (smoke rises making the air close to the floor safest to breath).

Use the monthly occasion to take two more priceless and cost-free steps:

- Test the smoke alarms in your home and barn to assure they're working and that their ten-year batteries are still securely in place. Half of all human deaths from home fires occur between 11PM and 7AM when most folks are sound asleep. Those alarms have to be in proper working order if they're going to wake the household and give everyone a chance to get out safely.
- Use this designated time each month to practice not only evacuating the building, but also to familiarize your critters with containment / transportation / lodging supplies. If you have small animals, familiarize them with their carriers. If you have large animals, don't just vacate the barn but go on to practice trailer loading them. Not all animals like their cages or trailers, in fact, many associate them with yucky things like vet visits and shots; make it fun with rewards as you begin to desensitize them and make the using them a routine practice instead of a scary oddity.

DAY 8: GO-TO POINTS

If fire strikes, everyone's personal responsibility should be to get out and get out immediately, assisting any critters or humans with special needs if possible because, literally, seconds count! If everyone exits from different rooms or areas of the home, having a chosen go-to point outside will allow you to count heads and assure everyone's accounted for quickly.

GET STARTED by determining ahead of time where your household will meet up following a fire. This might be across the street or down the road a safe distance; whatever it is, be sure everyone's clear on the location. When you practice your escape plan each month, go so far as to rally at your go-to point so everyone (including critters) get familiar with the spot. Go a step further and involve your neighbors in the monthly exercise – a great way to get to know one another, share life-saving information, and prioritize who you want to call on when in an emergency.

DAY 9: RENEZVOUS POINTS

Disasters don't always occur when everyone's home together. If some are at work or school or otherwise across town and you're unable to communicate due to the incident, everyone should know where to rendezvous as soon as possible. Pre-select two or three locations, just in case the first choice is compromised by the disaster. Prioritize these locations in order of preference and be sure everyone is clear on the order.

At the same time, it's helpful to identify a number of places you might stay until it's safe to return home. For example, friends or family who live outside the area likely to be affected by the incident may have space for you and your critters. Campgrounds or pet-friendly hotels may be helpful, especially if you gather a list of their addresses, directions, and phone numbers ahead of time. Ditto kennels and boarding facilities because, let's face it, Aunt Suzie might take you and the kids but not have room for your menagerie of pets; or the hotel may have vacancy for you and

be willing to accommodate your pets but they're not going to let you stow your horse or chickens in your room.

GET STARTED by contacting friends or family to see if they're willing and able to house you following a disaster. Collect all of the contact information (address, directions, and all possible phone numbers) for all who agree and distribute this to everyone in your household to carry with them at all times.

Contact the American Automobile Association or do your own research online for a detailed list of campsites and / or hotels. Gather the same data for boarding facilities in the area, as well as local animal shelters as a place to start should you and your critters get separated during the disaster. Make a copy of these lists for everyone in your household.

THINK REDUNDANCY and capture all of your possible rendezvous points and other contacts such as kennels and the like electronically on everyone's mobile devices, GPS units, etc. Don't rely entirely on electronic conveniences as they could fail you in the midst of an incident, but once you have a paper list, it'd be a great idea to back up it up with digital copies.

DAY 10: SHELTER-IN-PLACE PLAN

Not all disasters require evacuation. In some cases, staying put is recommended. Designate a room you'll use in such situations and begin preparing that space to be safe and comfortable.

GET STARTED with this video from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): [youtube.com/watch?v=9z-TG2vMDc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z-TG2vMDc4)

DAY 11: COMMUNICATION PLAN

Identify someone outside of the area to serve as contact if local communication lines are disrupted in the disaster. Consider alternative forms of communicating with loved ones away from home including text messaging (which may work when phone lines down), CB or ham radio, etc. Jot down your communications plan and make sure everyone in your household is familiar with it and any specialized equipment you plan to use.

GET STARTED with a video and templates available from FEMA at [youtube.com/watch?v=_kWTCykpZQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kWTCykpZQ4)

DAY 12: LOST FLYER

Pre-prepare a lost flyer, just in case you need it. If the unthinkable happens, you'll be ready to canvas the area looking for your furbaby.

GET STARTED by downloading a free template at JoBecker.weebly.com/resources.html and store at least one master copy in a sealed watertight bag with your emergency supplies, ready to make more copies if it's ever needed. Better yet, make paper copies just in case the power's out if or when you need to use them.

THINK REDUNDANCY by storing a digital copies online as well as on your mobile devices.

Don't forget to update the flyer with current pictures as your animal ages or as your contact info. changes.

If you already have any of the above items set aside with our emergency supplies or plans already detailed, good for you! Hold your head high, scratch your furry friend behind the ear, and substitute that step with one thing you've been meaning to do but never seem to get to.

By following this personal twelve-day prep. campaign you'll have:

- Several cost-free planning steps accomplished and perhaps a few more steps to do over the next upcoming weeks and months.
- At least some tools, equipment, and supplies gathered together that you likely didn't have before.
- A scheduled plan to acquire additional provisions in the weeks and months to come.
- No doubt, a longer list for Santa than before you started!
- And, several ready-made New Year's resolutions that will help keep you and those you love – both people and critters – safe and sound.

A pet mom and surrogate livestock handler for neighbors, Jo Becker is passionate about disaster planning for the entire family. Learn more, sign up for animal-centric eNews, and check out upcoming classes at www.JoBecker.weebly.com.