

# Are You and Your Pet Prepared for an Emergency?

By Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS

When 2017's Hurricane Irma struck near Gainesville, Florida, where pet parent Trenatee Coleman Solomon lives with her Shih Tzu mix Charlie Duce and Shih Tzu Roscoe Ace, she and her dogs evacuated to Kentucky. Trenatee's dogs were accustomed to making this road trip to visit Trenatee's parents but not to the significantly longer-than-usual drive owing to evacuation traffic. When they reached their destination, the dogs darted from the car and into the street (something they had never done before). A car hit Charlie, leaving him with life-threatening injuries that required a hospital stay and surgery that Trenatee couldn't afford. That's when a RedRover Relief grant helped her and her pets through this already distressing situation.



"RedRover assisted in paying for Charlie's surgery, and I am so grateful," Trenatee says. Now, she hopes other pet parents can learn from her experience.

"In everything you do, consider your pets," Trenatee says. "I should have stopped driving sooner out of consideration for my dogs."

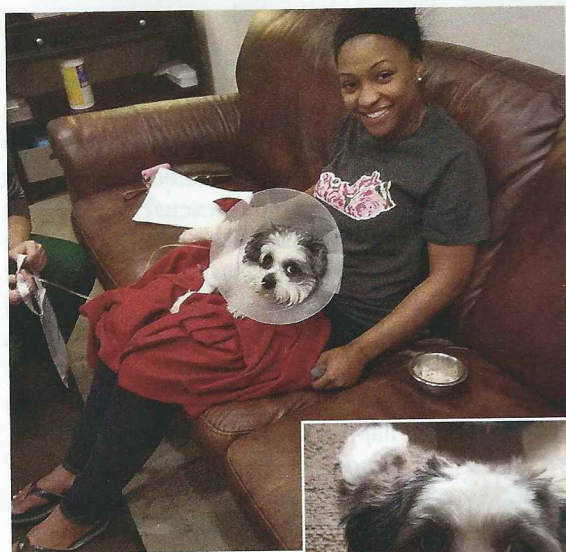
Some areas of the country also have their own animal-focused emergency responders. Philadelphia-based Red Paw Emergency Relief Team dispatches members of its team—a dozen firefighters and 3 military veterans—to residential fires and other disasters impacting people with pets in neighboring counties in Pennsylvania and parts of New Jersey. They provide round-the-clock services including search and rescue, emergency medical care and transport, emergency assistance, food and supply delivery, and more.

Red Paw founder Jen Leary explains, "We do this because we saw a void in the emergency response cycle for the 'everyday disasters.' We believe every city needs the services that Red Paw provides."

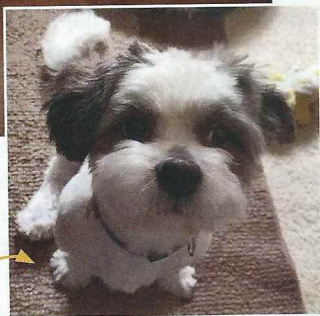
Check with your veterinarian and local emergency management agencies if they know of any similar organizations near you, but keep in mind that most places don't currently have this type of help available. As such, pet parents need to

## A Helping Paw

Charlie's situation is a familiar one for RedRover, an animal welfare nonprofit based in Sacramento, California, that offers financial relief and temporary shelter to animals in crisis and their human families in the United States and parts of Canada. "Often, when animals are evacuated to unfamiliar locations, their stress and fear can lead to illness or injury," says Nicole Forsyth, president and CEO of RedRover. "We believe that pets are family, so we provide soft hands and warm hearts when animals and people are in crisis and pain."



Trenatee with Charlie, as he was receiving veterinary care after his life-saving surgery.



Charlie, back to his healthy self.

De Repente/Shutterstock, Louis Solomon, Trenatee Coleman Solomon (Charlie's photo)

have their own pet-inclusive emergency plan in place for a variety of crises.

**Types of Situations to Prepare For**

Different regions of the country and types of community (urban, suburban, or rural) experience their own unique weather patterns and accompanying threats, but no one is immune to emergencies.

Nicole says, “No matter where you live, you should always include your pet in your emergency planning. If it is not safe for you, it is not safe for your pet.”

In general, have a plan in mind for the following situations:

- Earthquakes
- Fires
- Floods (natural or from water main breaks)
- Hazmat incidents
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Tsunamis
- Other severe weather

Follow your local emergency management agencies and fire departments on social media to stay abreast of any potential emergency conditions in your area.

**Pet-Friendly Prep Work**

Once disaster strikes, you’ll need to get to safety quickly—with your pet. Nicole says, “Never leave your pet behind if you evacuate!”

Prepare in advance so you aren’t left scrambling—your pet is depending on you to remain calm and comforting. When including a pet in emergency planning, develop contingencies for being homebound as well as having to escape:

- Prep your pet for the possibility of road travel; this includes getting him comfortable with being in a vehicle and in a pet carrier.
- Even if sheltering in place, get your pet comfortable with whatever items or equipment you might use to confine

him to a safe part of your home.

- Microchip your pet and have him wear an ID at all times (yes, even your indoor-only cat!).
- Have a trusted neighbor on alert to care for your pet if you aren’t home during the emergency (and offer to do the same for him or her), ensuring your neighbor knows in what part of the house to find your pet.
- Designate a refuge for your entire family that will accept pets, such as emergency shelters, hotels, or homes of loved ones. Locate boarding facilities and emergency veterinary hospitals nearby as well as in areas you might be evacuated to.
- Have an evacuation kit ready to go.

Keep your pet evacuation kit in a waterproof container that is easy to find and transport in an emergency. Although the kit might look different depending on where you live, your pet’s unique needs, and other factors, some items to include are:

- Pet first-aid items
- Your pet’s medication
- A week’s supply of food and fresh water
- Your pet’s medical and vaccination records (as well as microchip and licensing info)
- Temporary identification with the contact info of a friend or family member outside the area affected by the emergency
- A leash, carrier, or crate for each pet
- Hard copies of photos of your pet alone and with your family

**LOST AND FOUND**

Take immediate action if your pet is lost after a disaster or emergency:

- Start by checking your pet’s favorite hiding spots in and around your home. He might have hidden in a spot that makes him feel safe.
- If you can’t find your pet, contact nearby animal control agencies, shelters, and emergency evacuation centers right away, and continue following up.
- Post your pet’s photo and your contact information on fliers in your neighborhood and on social media.



Ask your pet’s vet what else to include.

When it comes to preparing for and weathering the proverbial or literal storm, keep in mind this bit of advice from Jen: “Whatever you do for yourself, do for your pets.”

*Andrea Vardaro Tucker, a board-certified editor in the life sciences and HealthyPet copy editor, lives in a suburb north of Pittsburgh with her human family members and 10-year-old Westie, Cole.*

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- **American Veterinary Medical Association: Pets and Disasters**—[avma.org/public/emergencycare/pages/pets-and-disasters.aspx](http://avma.org/public/emergencycare/pages/pets-and-disasters.aspx)
- **American Red Cross: Pet Disaster Preparedness**—[redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness.html](http://redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness.html)
- **Ready or Not, Here It Comes!**—a book by RedRover Responders Team Leader, Howard Edelstein, which guides children and their parents as they prepare themselves and their pets for emergency situations