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EDITOR'S PICK

Napa Humane

Napa Humane: The best time to prepare is before you need to

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Aug 4, 2026



When emergencies happen, they rarely give us time to prepare. That is why preparedness matters.

Napa CART/Courtesy photo

It is two o'clock in the morning.

Your phone begins buzzing with emergency alerts. The power is out. The smell of smoke hangs in the air. You have only minutes to decide what to take, where to go, and how quickly you can get there.

In that moment, most people know where their keys are.

Most people know where their wallet is.

But do they know where the cat carrier is?

Can they quickly find their dog's leash? Do they have enough medication for their pet? Is their microchip information up to date?

When emergencies happen, they rarely give us time to prepare. That is why preparedness matters.

Here in Napa County, we understand this better than most. Many of us remember the devastating fires of October 2017. Families were forced to evacuate with little warning. Some had time to gather belongings. Others had only moments to leave. For pet owners, the challenge was even greater. In the chaos of an emergency, keeping animals safe can be difficult if a plan is not already in place.



Wendi Piscia, seen here with Monkey, is the executive director of Napa Humane.

Submitted photo

Wildfires remain a reality in Northern California. We also face extreme heat, power shutoffs, earthquakes, winter storms, and other emergencies that can disrupt daily life. While we cannot control when disasters happen, we can control how prepared we are when they do.

And that preparation should always include our pets.

Why planning ahead matters

It is easy to assume you'll figure things out when the time comes. Unfortunately, emergencies rarely work that way. Animals often react differently under stress, making evacuation more difficult if you haven't planned ahead.

Preparation gives you the ability to act instead of react.

It also increases the likelihood that pets stay with their families, which is the best outcome for everyone involved.

Start with identification

If there is one thing every pet owner should do today, it is verify that their pet's identification is current.

A collar with current contact information is a good first step, and a microchip provides additional protection if that collar is lost or damaged.

However, a microchip is only effective if the registration information is current.

Every year, shelters encounter pets with microchips linked to old phone numbers or outdated addresses. Taking five minutes to update that information can make all the difference if your pet ever becomes separated from you.

Think of it as insurance you hope never to need.

Build a pet emergency kit

Every household should have an emergency kit. Pets need one too.

A basic pet emergency kit should include:

- Food for several days
- Bottled water
- Medications
- Vaccination records
- Recent photographs of your pet
- A leash or harness
- Food and water bowls
- Waste bags or litter supplies
- Any comfort items your pet relies on

Store everything together in an easily accessible location.

When an emergency occurs, you should not have to search through multiple rooms trying to gather supplies.

The goal is to be ready to leave quickly if necessary.

Don't forget the carrier

This may seem obvious, but it is often overlooked.

Many cat owners know exactly where the carrier is. The challenge is that it may be buried in storage.

A carrier that cannot be reached quickly does not do much good during an evacuation.

Make sure carriers are easy to access. Better yet, help your cat become comfortable with the carrier before an emergency occurs. Leaving it out occasionally with a blanket or treats inside can make it feel familiar rather than frightening.

The same principle applies to dogs. Ensure leashes, harnesses, and crates are easy to find when you need them.

Know where you can go

One of the biggest challenges during an evacuation is determining where pets can stay.

Not every hotel accepts animals. Friends or relatives may not be able to accommodate pets. Boarding facilities may have limited space during large-scale emergencies.

Research options before you need them.

Having a list of possible destinations can reduce stress and save valuable time if evacuation becomes necessary.

But there is another important question: What happens if an emergency occurs when you're not home?

Wildfires and other disasters often happen during the workday, when returning home may not be possible. Every pet owner should identify a trusted neighbor, friend, or family member who can access their home and help evacuate pets if needed. Make sure they know where carriers, leashes, medications, and emergency supplies are located. Introduce them to your pets before an emergency occurs so the animals are comfortable with them. On high fire danger days, consider checking in with neighbors and reviewing your plans. A simple neighborhood support system can make a critical difference when every minute counts.

Practice makes a difference

We often think about practicing emergency plans with children, but pets benefit from practice too.

Can your dog comfortably get into the car?

Will your cat willingly enter a carrier?

Do your pets respond reliably when called?

These small skills can become very important during an emergency.

Practicing now, when everyone is calm, makes future situations easier to manage.

Look to the local experts

How to plan for an emergency is not something you have to figure out on your own.

Here in Napa County, Napa Community Animal Response Team, better known as Napa CART, plays a critical role in emergency preparedness and response for animals. Their volunteers work alongside emergency management partners to help support animals before, during, and after disasters.

Napa CART offers valuable information about preparedness planning, evacuation resources, and ways for pet owners to be ready when emergencies occur. They are the local experts in this work, and I encourage every pet owner to become familiar with their resources.

The best time to learn about emergency preparedness is before an emergency happens.

Preparedness is an act of love

Sometimes people hear the word "preparedness" and think about worst-case scenarios.

I think about something different.

I think about peace of mind.

Preparedness is not about living in fear. It is about making thoughtful decisions ahead of time so that when uncertainty arrives, you are not starting from scratch.

We vaccinate pets before they become sick. We use flea and tick prevention before parasites become a problem. We spay and neuter to prevent future challenges.

Preparedness follows the same philosophy.

It is prevention.

It is an act of care.

It is an investment in keeping families together when circumstances become difficult.

When your phone buzzes with an evacuation alert at two o'clock in the morning, you don't want to spend precious minutes searching for a leash, looking for a carrier, or wondering where you'll take your pets. Those decisions should already be made.

Because when emergencies happen, the goal is not simply to evacuate.

It's to make sure every member of the family gets out safely, including the four-legged ones.

For more information about pet preparedness resources, visit Napa CART and Napa Humane. A little planning today can make all the difference tomorrow.

Wendi Piscia is the executive director of Napa Humane. The topics discussed in this feature are part of a larger conversation about animal welfare in Napa County. Want to learn more? Explore the entire series at **<https://bit.ly/NVRNapaHumane>**.