



## Human Animal Support Services Disaster Response Organizational Planning and Preparedness Getting Started Guide

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## What is Disaster Preparedness and Response?

The word “disaster” can mean many things, from an incident that affects a small population to a national event. Each individual animal shelter has different emergencies they may contend with due to region, susceptibility to certain natural disasters, facility design, and other factors. A disaster preparedness and response plan involves understanding the various types of risks and hazards (natural or man-made disasters) that may harm or negatively impact you, your staff, your animals, your operation and your organization, and your community. Preparing for such events requires the development of actions and procedures that help to minimize their negative impact, and enable you to effectively respond.

## What Problem Does a Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan Solve?

Waiting until a disaster has occurred to create a plan takes valuable time and energy away from immediate response activities. It may leave animal welfare organizations without the resources needed for a comprehensive response. By creating plans, inventorying available resources, and creating mutual aid agreements before an emergency occurs, organizations can hit the ground running when an emergency occurs and spend their time and efforts caring for those impacted by the event. Disaster preparedness plans may include:

- Assigning staff roles in advance to avoid confusion, stress, and panic
- Identifying biggest needs and developing the support mechanisms to meet those needs
- Troubleshooting potential problems and creating contingency plans
- Mitigating some impacts of a disaster altogether, creating less work when a disaster occurs

## Terminology for Disaster Preparedness and Response

**Disaster:** A serious problem occurring over a short or long period of time that causes widespread human, material, economic, or environmental loss that exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its resources. \*

**Disaster Resilience:** The ability of individuals, communities, organizations, and states to adapt to and recover from hazards, shocks, or stresses without compromising long-term prospects for development. \*\*

**Essential functions:** Critical activities that cannot cease, and may be required to be maintained by laws or statutes in your state or jurisdiction. They include the responsibilities or tasks that your organization must maintain or complete to be considered operational.

**Preparedness:** The measures that ensure the organized mobilization of personnel, funds, equipment, and supplies within a safe environment for effective relief. \*\*\*

**Recovery:** The process of returning to normal operations following a disaster or emergency event.

**Response:** The set of activities implemented after the impact of a disaster to assess the needs, reduce the suffering, limit the spread and consequences of the disaster, and open the way to rehabilitation. \*\*\*



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**Social Vulnerability:** The potential negative effects on communities caused by external stresses on human health. Such stresses include natural or human-caused disasters or disease outbreaks.

**Note:** Reducing social vulnerability can decrease both human suffering and economic loss. \*\*\*\*

**Social Vulnerability Index (SVI):** A ranking system that uses 15 U.S. Census variables to help local officials identify communities that may need support before, during, or after disasters. \*\*\*\*

\* **Source:** [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#)

\*\* **Source:** [Governance and Social Development Resource Centre](#)

\*\*\* **Source:** [Disasters and Emergencies - World Health](#)

\*\*\*\* **Source:** [CDC - Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#)

## Common Acronyms and Abbreviations

- [ASPCA - Most Commonly Used Emergency & Disaster Acronyms](#)
- [FEMA Acronyms & Abbreviations](#)

## What is Needed to Implement a Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan?

All organizations regardless of staff size, resources, and funding levels can implement some emergency preparedness and response activities on the individual, organizational, and community levels. Assistance may be available through your local office of emergency management, your state animal or agricultural response team, your [state or territory chapter of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster \(VOAD\)](#), and other animal welfare organizations in your area.

## Benefits of Disaster Planning and Preparedness

- Faster responses to emergency situations
- Increased pet reunification
- Increased life-saving
- Integration with other emergency response organizations
- Collaborative opportunities with external organizations and agencies
- Clearer communication and easier information dissemination
- Streamlined donations and support before and after a disaster
- Mutual aid offered to neighbors
- Resources and funds are used efficiently
- Provides direction amidst chaos
- Less stress on public and staff

## What does success look like?

Disaster preparedness and response focuses on identifying and supporting community members and their pets who are most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters, and providing support and resources ahead of, during, and following emergencies. Organizations that have created comprehensive disaster response plans put measures into place to mitigate the effects of disasters, and included all members of their communities in their planning process, keeping their most vulnerable members in mind are poised to best support both pets and people in need and ensure that their communities remain resilient and recover faster following an emergency event.



Successful programs will incorporate preparedness measures, identify risks, and create written plans for responding to various emergencies depending on severity and proximity, and may also provide training for staff and volunteers and ensure that their staff have personal and household emergency plans prepared.

Organizations will also have an established relationship with the emergency manager for their locality and engage in planning with other animal welfare organizations, human service providers, and disaster response agencies within and beyond their community. As part of the emergency planning process, organizations will ensure that pets are included in any jurisdictional emergency plans, particularly those that address evacuations and emergency sheltering operations for community members. They will also proactively connect with community members who are most vulnerable during disasters and provide planning information and assistance as well as supplies to aid with follow-through in the event of an evacuation, such as collars, leashes, and carriers for those who don't have them on hand.

Recognizing that each community is unique, it is essential that information and resources on disaster preparedness and response are accessible through various sources and formats, and in all languages spoken within the community. To determine which areas of their community might benefit most from additional support, organizations will utilize the information available through the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index and a better understanding of the socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, linguistic, and other challenges that members of their community may face. An organization may use these results to counter inequities through focused outreach, connection to existing resources that community members may not be aware of, and creating solutions to address barriers to accessing available resources.

## **How To Begin: Create an Organizational Plan**

Organizations can begin preparing for emergency events by identifying what hazards are most likely to impact their facility, staff, volunteers, and animals in their care. Once you have a clear idea of the situations you'll need to prepare for, you can begin to draft plans and protocols to address emergency events.

### **Step 1: Identify hazards most likely to impact your organization**

- **Contact your local Office of Emergency Management** to request a copy of your jurisdiction's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).
  - The "Hazard Analysis" section will provide information on the disasters most common in or likely to impact your area.
- The [Continuity Advisor Risk and Threat Assessment template](#) can be used to record the internal and external threats to the organization, assess the risk of disruption to prioritized activities, and visualize the effect a plan has on reducing the likelihood and impact of a risk.
- The [National Risk Index](#) helps users better understand the natural hazard risk of their respective areas to help communities take appropriate action to reduce risk.
- The [FEMA Flood Map Service Center](#) is the official online location to find all flood hazard mapping products created under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- **NOAA Climate Data Online** provides free access to NCDC's archive of global historical weather and climate data in addition to station history information.



- [Search Tool](#)
- [Mapping Tool](#)
- [Data Tools](#)
- **Emergency Considerations for Planning**
  - Direct Facility Emergencies
    - Boil water order for specific locations
    - Shelter in place order
    - Power outage
    - Burst pipes
    - Structure fire
    - Incidents of workplace violence
    - Road conditions blocking deliveries
  - Community Emergencies (Potential Facility Impact)
    - Flooding
    - Hurricane
    - Tornado
    - Wildfires
    - Earthquake
    - Landslides
    - Human pandemic
- **Pro Tips:**
  - Sign up for a free membership to the [Red Cross Ready Rating program](#). This program offers two assessments to measure your organization's preparedness as well as access to their resource center, additional templates, and more!
    - The **ReadyGo Assessment** is a brief 25-question assessment designed for organizations that are relatively new to emergency planning. Completing this assessment will help you evaluate some of the most critical strengths and weaknesses of your current program.
    - The **ReadyAdvance Assessment** provides a more in-depth measurement of your organization's preparedness plans and is meant for organizations that have taken some basic steps but are ready to become even more prepared.

## Step 2: Create an employee contact list

Utilize the [Employee Emergency Contact Information List Template](#) to outline employee contacts.

## Step 3: Complete the [Organization Emergency Contact Information Reference Sheet](#)

Gather information on your location, points of contact, and emergency contact information for non-emergency services and other service providers for your organization.

## Step 4: Review and complete the [Facility Safety Inspection Checklist](#)

This checklist should be completed prior to a risk of an emergency event whenever possible, and during the recovery phase after an event if not.

## Step 5: Identify resources and partners that can assist with disaster response efforts

Utilize the [Evacuation External Resource Contact List](#) to gather information.



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- **Pro Tips:**
  - When considering available resources and partners that can assist with disaster response efforts, include other animal shelters and animal welfare organizations in your area in your planning process.
  - Consider alternative options for temporary shelter locations such as retail stores, warehouse spaces, and fairgrounds.

## Step 6: Complete the Best Friends [Facility Emergency Action Plan Template](#)

This template provides a framework to complete a facility evacuation and shelter-in-place plan.

- **Sample Resource Inventory Lists**
  - [Vermont Disaster Animal Response Team - Basic Equipment Checklist for DART Teams \(pg 13-14\)](#)
  - [California Animal Response Emergency System - Shelter Supply and Equipment List 3](#)

## Step 7: Complete the [Continuity of Operations Plan Template](#)

This template helps determine essential functions that must continue throughout or following an emergency and creates a plan to maintain those essential operations.

## Step 8: Complete the [Recovery Plan Template](#)

This template identifies the tasks needing to be accomplished to transition back to your primary facility and to return to normal operations following an emergency event if an evacuation has occurred.

- **Sample Evacuation/Shelter-In-Place Plans**
  - [Greenville County Animal Care Emergency Evacuation Plan](#)
  - [Greenville County Animal Care Tornado Response Plan](#)
- **Pro Tips:**
  - Once you've created an emergency plan, communicate the plan to staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders that are included in or affected by the plan.
  - Review the plan at least annually with all staff and volunteers.
  - Include the plan in onboarding materials for new staff members.
  - Practice the plan! This may include tabletop exercises and practical drills.

## Training for Staff and Volunteers

Training staff and volunteers on emergency procedures and protocols before a disaster is imperative. Anyone participating in response activities should be familiar with all regulations, standard operating procedures, and any other emergency protocols your organization has put into place. Standardized training on emergency response helps keep people and animals safe during response activities, and also allows animal responders to integrate into the larger emergency response framework.

- [Emergency Response Training for Staff and Volunteers](#)



## Data Tracking and Metrics

It is crucial to keep appropriate paperwork, such as receipts and forms, and to document and record the various actions taken during a disaster response. This enables the organization to share operational successes with supporters and donors and may provide opportunities to better plan for specific types of disasters in the future. Data collected may be used to reconcile financial reports, provide an outlook on how donor dollars were allocated, and provide a historical reference to guide future planning efforts. Accurate record-keeping is important to the continued success and support of your organization in future disasters. Consider what types of forms and/or spreadsheets may be necessary to develop ahead of time to help make things more efficient.

- **Data collection considerations**
  - Number of animal intakes
  - Number of pet reunifications
  - Number of volunteers utilized
  - Number of operational hours spent by staff and volunteers on animal care throughout the disaster response
  - Quantity of pet food / other consumables used
  - Number of partners that helped to support transports or animal care
  - How much money was raised to help support the efforts
  - Statistics and totals of other services provided such as microchips, medical care, vaccines, and associated expenses
  - [FEMA 214 Activity Log](#) for time spent on disasters (for municipal shelters and possibly others)

## Supporting Documents

### Additional Resources

- [Organization Disaster Plan Workbook](#)
- [Emergency Response Training for Staff and Volunteers](#)
- [North Valley Animal Disaster Group](#)

### Templates

- [Facility Emergency Action Plan Template](#)
- [Continuity of Operations Plan Template](#)
- [Recovery Plan Template](#)
- [Risk and Threat Assessment Template](#)
- [Employee Emergency Contact Information List Template](#)
- [Organization Emergency Contact Information Reference Sheet](#)
- [Office Safety Inspection Checklist](#)
- [Evacuation External Resource Contact List](#)

### Sample Plans

- [Greenville County Animal Care Emergency Evacuation Plan](#)
- [Greenville County Animal Care Tornado Response Plan](#)

### Organization Highlight: San Diego Humane Society

- [Pet Disaster Preparedness Information | San Diego Humane Society](#)
- [San Diego Humane Society Encourages Animal Emergency Planning](#)
- [Emergency Response Team | San Diego Humane Society](#)