

# Animals and Fire

A summary of the presentation given by Dana Stangel of Teranga Ranch at Senator Portantino's "After the Fire" event at Woodbury College last month.

Animals and fire don't go together very well. From the pet situation to the wildlife front, there is a lot to consider before, during and after a fire.

## **GET READY!**

In times of no disaster: organize documentation and store it electronically. Who are your animals, are they healthy and can you prove they are yours? Organizing documentation involves procuring:

- Recent photos, including views of the animal that show distinguishing marks.
- Vet records, especially those that show an animal has been fixed and vaccinated.
- Microchip records
- Prescription information
- Vet contact information

Make sure you are storing these electronically, and make sure your computers are backed up. (This makes it so that when you are running out the door- you won't need to grab your computer because it's all backed up somewhere else.) I also recommend putting this info on a memory stick and keeping it with your "go bag". Further, I recommend sending the info to a loved one who doesn't live near you.

In times of no disaster: make sure you have all of your animals and all of your crates LABELED. I know we all hate labels these days, but it can save your animal! How do you label an animal? With a microchip! It's fast, it's easy and it could be the difference between you getting your lost animal back or not. You can microchip anything from a bunny to a horse. Know that it isn't a GPS device, it won't tell you where your animal is, but a vet can scan it to get your information so that someone can return a found animal. How else? Collars and ID tags! Cats and dogs should have these all the time, even in case they just go running out the door on a non-disaster Sunday! I particularly love the reflective collars that have the tag already attached (it's less likely to fall off...) How else? Horses can be labeled with leg bands, or even nontoxic paint. If someone has an allergy, make sure that's on their label as well. "No alfalfa" can be painted onto a horse, "epileptic" can be engraved or printed on a dog's tag. Luggage tags are also great and can be put on carriers, crates and harnesses.

## **In times of no disaster: acquire the transportation and logistical items you will need.**

- Carriers and crates. These aren't the same. Carriers are compact and made for transporting animals. Crates are larger and animals can hang out comfortably in them for a longer time.
- Bowls, leashes (non-retractable, please!), harnesses, food, small empty litter pan, toys. Toys? Just like your kids, having something personal and familiar will help them deal with the situation. If you have horses, you might want to also include buckets and a shovel.
- Blankets and tarps. Cover can help keep animals in carriers and crates calm. If you wind up in a shelter situation, it will help your animals stay healthy, too- creating a barrier between them and other animals that might be there. Blankets or towels inside of crates and carriers also just help keep animals more comfortable.
- Transportation for ALL your animals. Do you have the space to move them all at the same time? If not, what is your plan? Do you have your own car? If not, what is your plan? Many people don't have enough transportation for all their horses. So then, what is the plan? There needs to be a plan that doesn't involve going back and forth 12 times. You may have only one shot.
- Set up contacts with friends or family nearby AND farther away. You might need help evacuating, so you'll need nearby friends. You might need a place to bring the animals, so you'll need friends that are further away.

## **In times of no disaster- PRACTICE WITH YOUR ANIMALS**

One of the major problems people run into when trying to evacuate with animals is the animal's behavior that's a result of the emergency situation. So, first of all- be ready for that! But secondly- you might be able to make this less of a problem by practicing a few times. With ALL the animals, and with the friends you have identified. Animals are creatures of habit. If they have done something successfully before, they are likely to try it again. When something is new and scary, well, it's a lot like dealing with kids. It's going to be more difficult. I encourage you to go through the entire process from start to finish. This will help you identify where your weak spots are in the plan, and how to reinforce them.

### **GET SET!**

Hopefully, you will be lucky enough to shelter in place. If this is your option, it's the best one. Animals don't like to be moved from the situation they know and they particularly don't like it when you are rushed and full of adrenaline. Sheltering in place is best for your animals and also best for the emergency personnel out there trying to save homes. The more people out on the street, the less room on that street for those who are trying to evacuate or the first responders. When you are sheltering in place, however, you don't just sit idly. You may have to evacuate, so you get set.

- Put cats in confined spaces like the bathroom. Cats will pick up on your energy before you realize you're agitated. They will hide and they will not want to come out. Wrangling a house cat is no fun.
- Pull out and organize carriers and crates. Have them ready for animals to get into. Have cat crates near the bathroom they are in. Have dog crate loaded into car so you can walk dog right into crate.
- Reptiles? Get them into their carriers and stack by the door.
- Basically, load your car with what you can, and have animals ready to be put into their transportation.

### **GO!**

Don't wait for them to tell you more than once. If you have heard it might be time to go- get started on your plan and get out. The sooner you take action the better. Imagine, if you get yourself taken care of, and your animals are safe, you might even be able to go help someone who didn't have such a great plan in place!

It's good to have a few plans in place. We are often lucky enough to have more than an hour, but what if you only have 15 min?

What about horses? Is setting them free the answer? According to the Fire Department, it isn't. Horses set free during fires will be running in every direction. They panic. They will be in the road in the way of emergency personnel. They are at a huge risk of being hit by a car. When the fire is upon you, visibility can be terrible. Horses and cars sharing the road in a situation like this might not end well. Should they be padlocked in? Probably not. That prevents emergency personnel from helping them quickly if necessary. Know that firefighters have the priority of protecting structures. If the horses are near or in the structure, they are more likely to be able to be saved. Hopefully, you will never find yourself so close to the fire, but from what we have learned recently, you just never know!

## **WHAT ABOUT WILDLIFE?**

Wildlife suffers during fires. The smallest animals have a harder time getting out- simply as a result of shorter legs and inability to out run the fire. Some birds will succumb to smoke, some, especially the larger birds, can make it out. Small reptiles have trouble getting out. Smaller mammals like rodents might not make it. Opossums are really slow and don't have much of a chance. Skunks and raccoons have a better chance. Larger animals like coyote, mountain lion and bear can make it out. But sometimes when they try to get across a part of their territory that is too hot, their feet can burn. This is a horrific injury and often leads to a slow and painful death involving infection and starvation. After the fire, wildlife can be just about anywhere. If you can imagine just running for your life, and not knowing

where you wound up exactly. Wildlife will be in the street, so please drive more carefully. Wildlife will be in your yard, so please keep an extra eye on your pets.

Between climate change, deforestation and development, the planet is becoming warmer and windier. We can count on events that will decimate towns. It is up to us to prepare for it. Careful planning can save lives."

~Dana Stangel, Teranga Ranch