CHAPTER 12

Pet Evacuation & Shelter

New here? Ready, Set, Ready is a 10-minute starting point: an honest assessment, one gap closed for real, then a map for using the rest of this site. Once something's actually happened, Surviving picks up where this chapter leaves off, organized by chronology instead of category. Curious how Tier, Stage, and Phase relate? See the Glossary.

Why This Category Matters

After Hurricane Katrina, a significant number of people refused to evacuate because there was nowhere for them to go that would take their pets too, and many who did evacuate without them tried to go back for them, putting themselves at further risk. Congress responded with the federal PETS Act (2006), which requires state and local disaster planners to account for pets and service animals. That requirement doesn't extend to every shelter, though: most Red Cross and general public shelters still only accept service animals, not pets, for public health reasons. That single fact (general shelters aren't pet shelters) is the reason this entire chapter exists as its own category rather than a line item in Shelter & Structural Safety.

Every skill and item below is genuinely about your pet's welfare, but it's also about making evacuation something your household will actually do when it needs to, instead of hesitating over what happens to a family member who can't pack their own bag.

WARNING

Human Medications Are a Real Poisoning Risk to Pets

Several common household and emergency-kit medications are toxic, sometimes fatally, to dogs and cats. Ibuprofen and other NSAIDs are toxic to both. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is especially dangerous to cats, who lack the ability to metabolize it safely, and can be fatal even in small amounts. Xylitol (a sweetener in some medications, gum, and toothpaste) is highly toxic to dogs. Keep the Medical Care chapter's human medication supplies physically separated from pets, and if you suspect a pet has ingested any human medication, call your vet or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (888-426-4435) or the Pet Poison Helpline (855-764-7661) immediately rather than waiting to see if symptoms appear.

Stored vs. Produced

The same stored-versus-produced shift that runs through this manual's other chapters applies here too. Tier 1 is Stored: evacuating or sheltering with pets using supplies staged in advance. Tier 3 is Produced: commercial pet food, veterinary care, and medications are no longer reliably available, and the focus shifts to producing pet food locally and managing pet health with home-level skill. Tier 2 is the transition: daily care and triage without a vet, but still running on the stored kit rather than local production. Tier 4 is Produced at community scale. Knowing whether a given supply or skill is stored or produced is the difference between a plan that runs out and one that doesn't.

Tier 1: Short-to-Medium Term (Hours – 14 Days)

Goal: *Stored: using what's already on hand. Immediate pet safety, evacuation readiness, and basic care when utility services (water/power) are disrupted.*

Tier 1 is about being able to evacuate with your pets calmly and quickly, or shelter in place with them safely, using supplies staged in advance. Most of what makes pet evacuation fail isn't lack of love; it's lack of a pre-packed kit and a practiced routine.

Skills to Build

- **Pet First Aid:** Basic wound care, pet CPR, and recognizing distress signs (lethargy, excessive panting, tremors, hiding). A dedicated pet first aid class (many Red Cross chapters and some vet clinics offer them) is a real, worthwhile investment: pet anatomy and dosing are different enough from human first aid that generic knowledge doesn't transfer directly. See the Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics skill guide for the core technique.
- **Evacuation Logistics:** Practice loading each pet into its carrier or crate quickly and calmly before it's an emergency: a cat who has never seen its carrier except on vet-visit days will fight being loaded exactly when speed matters most. See the Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics skill guide for carrier-training technique.
- **Identification Management:** Keep microchip registration, license tags, and collar ID current and correct: a microchip with an outdated phone number helps no one. Verify the registration annually, not just at implant time.
- **Shelter Identification:** Know, in advance, which local shelters, hotels, or fairgrounds accept pets. See the note above on why this can't be assumed of a general shelter.

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The **Pet Evacuation & Shelter Addendum** builds these into real, tested competency.

For the hands-on how-to:

Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics

Tech & Equipment

- **Pet Carriers/Crates:** Properly sized for each animal, labeled with your contact info and "EMERGENCY – DO NOT SEPARATE": a label that matters if you and your pet are ever separated during a chaotic evacuation.
- **Pet First Aid Kit:** Styptic powder (stops minor bleeding, e.g., a torn nail), saline, a muzzle (even calm pets may bite when injured and frightened), a sling, vet records, and gauze.
- **Microchip Scanner:** Optional, but useful for verifying your own pet's chip is actually registering correctly, and potentially for helping reunite a neighbor's lost pet.
- **Digital Photo Backup:** Current photos of you together with each pet, stored off-device (cloud or printed): this is standard evidence shelters and rescue organizations use to help confirm ownership during reunification.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Food & water	14-day supply, airtight/waterproof containers	Same rotation discipline as the Water and Food chapters' human supplies.
Medications	14-day supply of regular meds	Heartworm, flea/tick, thyroid, etc.; see the flea/tick species warning below before restocking these.
Leashes/harnesses	Extra set(s)	In case originals are lost, damaged, or another household member needs to handle the pet simultaneously.
Sanitation	Litter, poop bags, disinfectant, waste bags	Plan for a shelter or vehicle environment, not just home.
Comfort items	Familiar blanket, toy, or bed	Genuinely reduces a pet's stress in an unfamiliar environment; don't treat this as optional.
Vaccination records	Physical and digital copies	Required by most pet-friendly shelters and boarding facilities; don't assume you'll have time to request them from your vet during an actual evacuation.

WARNING

Flea/Tick Products: Species Matters

Permethrin-based flea and tick products made for dogs are highly toxic, often fatally, to cats, and this isn’t limited to direct application: a cat can be poisoned simply by grooming a treated dog it lives with. Never use a dog-labeled flea/tick product on a cat, check labels carefully in multi-pet households, and keep a treated dog separated from any cats until the product has fully dried, per the product’s own instructions.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Pet carriers/crates sized, labeled, and pets comfortable being loaded into them
- [ ] Microchip and ID tag information current, verified within the last year
- [ ] 14-day pet food/water supply and 14-day medication supply stocked
- [ ] Pet first aid kit assembled, including a muzzle and styptic powder

- [ ] Vaccination records (physical + digital) accessible without needing to contact the vet during an emergency
- [ ] Pet-friendly shelters/hotels within evacuation range identified in advance
- [ ] Flea/tick products checked for correct species before use in multi-pet households
- [ ] Human medications stored physically separate from pet-accessible areas
- [ ] Practiced: full evacuation-loading drill completed with every pet in the household

Tier 2: Extended (2 Weeks – 3 Months)

Goal: *The stored-to-produced transition, still running on the stored kit but without professional support. Sustain pet health and hygiene when veterinary services are unavailable and you are in a static or temporary shelter environment.*

Tier 2 assumes the household (with pets) is either sheltering in place for an extended period or living somewhere temporary, and that a vet visit for anything short of a true emergency isn't realistic. The focus shifts to sustained daily care and basic triage without professional support.

Skills to Build

- **Pet Triage:** Assess injury severity and prioritize care without a vet available. This is similar in spirit to the Medical Care chapter's human triage guidance, but pet-specific: know which symptoms (labored breathing, unresponsiveness, uncontrolled bleeding, suspected poisoning) mean an emergency-only vet or emergency hotline call is worth the risk, versus what can wait or be managed at home.
- **Dietary Management:** Learn to prepare a nutritionally reasonable homemade diet from bulk ingredients if commercial pet food runs out, ideally worked out with a vet in advance, since dogs and cats have real, different nutritional requirements (cats in particular require taurine, which isn't reliably present in a homemade diet without deliberate sourcing).
- **Behavioral Management:** Calm anxious or traumatized pets in unfamiliar environments. Consistent routine, familiar scent items, and patience matter more than corrective training during this period.
- **Waste Management:** Properly dispose of pet waste in a shelter or temporary living situation. Cross-reference the Sanitation & Hygiene chapter's waste containment guidance, since pet waste carries its own disease-transmission risk if mismanaged.

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For the hands-on how-to:

Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics

Tech & Equipment

- **Pet Thermometer:** A digital rectal thermometer for monitoring fever. Normal temperature ranges differ from humans (roughly 100–102.5°F for most dogs and cats), so know the normal range before assuming a reading is abnormal.
- **Manual Can Opener:** For opening canned pet food without power, the same principle as the Food chapter's human equivalent.
- **Collapsible Bowls:** Lightweight and easy to transport or store; useful whether sheltering in place or relocated.
- **Pet Grooming Kit:** Brushes, nail clippers, and pet-safe shampoo. Matted fur and overgrown nails are a real welfare and health issue over an extended period, not just cosmetic.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Bulk pet food	3-month supply, dry kibble	Stored in Mylar bags with oxygen absorbers, same technique as the Food chapter's bulk staples.
Extended medications	3-month supply of chronic meds	Discuss an extended supply directly with your vet first. Non-veterinary-labeled (fish/livestock) antibiotics are sometimes discussed as an unregulated last resort in prepper circles, but species-specific dosing and drug safety differ meaningfully between animals; treat this the same as the human equivalent caution in the Medical Care chapter, not as a casual substitute for veterinary guidance.
Bulk sanitation	3-month litter, poop bags, disinfectant	Same rotation/storage principle as other bulk household supplies.
Comfort/morale items	Extra treats, toys, familiar scents	A genuine welfare need over an extended disruption, not a luxury.
Pet-friendly shelter list	5+ locations within 50 miles, printed	A phone-stored list is useless once the phone dies. Print it, the same principle as the Communication chapter's frequency list.

Northern Utah Note

Be Ready Utah publishes a pet-specific evacuation kit checklist and maintains information on pet-friendly shelter options, worth reviewing directly alongside this chapter, since it's updated more frequently than this manual and reflects current state guidance.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Pet triage priorities understood (emergency-only vet situations vs. manageable-at-home)
- [ ] Homemade diet plan reviewed with a vet in advance, including species-specific nutrition needs
- [ ] Pet thermometer on hand with normal temperature range known
- [ ] 3-month bulk pet food supply stored in Mylar + oxygen absorbers

- [ ] 3-month chronic medication supply discussed with a vet
- [ ] Printed pet-friendly shelter list (5+ locations) on hand
- [ ] Grooming kit assembled and basic grooming skills practiced
- [ ] Practiced: pet waste disposal routine rehearsed for a temporary/shelter environment

Tier 3: Permanent (Indefinite)

Goal: *Produced: producing pet food and care rather than buying it. Long-term pet sustainability, community integration, and self-sufficiency without commercial pet supply chains.*

Tier 3 assumes commercial pet food, veterinary care, and medications are no longer reliably available. The focus shifts to producing pet food locally, managing pet health with home-level skill and herbal support, and, for households maintaining small livestock, understanding basic breeding and care beyond a single companion animal.

Skills to Build

- **Pet Herbal Medicine:** Identify and prepare safe herbal remedies: chamomile for mild anxiety is broadly considered safe for dogs and cats in appropriate doses. Aloe is more complicated: aloe vera is actually toxic to dogs and cats if ingested (it can cause vomiting and diarrhea), so topical use for minor burns is reasonable only with supervision to prevent licking, and a pet-formulated aloe product with the toxic compounds removed is safer than using a houseplant directly. When in doubt, treat any new herbal remedy the way you'd treat a new medication: research the specific species and dose first.
- **Breeding/Reproduction:** Basic understanding of reproduction if maintaining a small herd or flock (rabbits, chickens) for sustained protein: a real skill with real welfare and population-management implications, not just a technical add-on.
- **Community Pet Care:** Organize shared feeding, grooming, and medical care with neighbors, the pet-specific version of the mutual aid networks described in other chapters.
- **Sustainable Sanitation:** Compost pet waste where safe and legal. Dog and cat waste specifically should not go into a compost pile intended for food-crop soil (unlike humanure, it can carry pathogens and parasites that survive typical home composting temperatures); direct it to a dedicated, non-food-adjacent composting or disposal method instead. See <a

href="/skills/household-trash-and-pet-waste-disposal/">Household Trash & Pet Waste Disposal for the actual bag-or-bury technique.

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For the hands-on how-to:

Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics

Tech & Equipment

- **Pet Medical Library:** Physical books on pet first aid, herbal medicine, and nutrition, same principle as the Medical Care chapter's medical library.
- **Basic Surgical Tools:** Sterilizable forceps, scissors, and sutures for minor procedures only. Treat this the same as the human equivalent in the Medical Care chapter: appropriate for what a trained layperson can safely do, not a substitute for veterinary surgery.
- **Community Communication:** A shared sign language or gesture system for coordinating pet care non-verbally within a group; builds on the Access & Functional Needs chapter's community communication guidance.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Feed stock / livestock	5+ year ingredient supply or small livestock source	Chicken, rice, vegetables, or a small source like rabbits/chickens; plan alongside the Food chapter's Tier 3 livestock guidance.
Pet-safe herbal remedies	Chamomile, valerian, aloe (topical only), etc.	Valerian is worth a specific note: cats often respond to it more like catnip (stimulating) rather than the mild sedative effect seen in dogs and humans; know your species before assuming an effect.
Raw materials	Soap, oils, fabrics	For making pet hygiene products once commercial supply is gone.
Community pact	Formalized shared pet care agreement	Builds on the community pacts in other chapters: explicitly covers feeding, grooming, and medical support for pets.
Barter items	Extra pet food, medications, supplies	High trade value among other pet-owning households in a self-sufficiency scenario.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Herbal remedy use understood per-species, including aloe’s ingestion risk
- [ ] Sustainable local pet food source established (grown feed or small livestock)
- [ ] Pet waste composting kept separate from any food-crop soil system
- [ ] Basic surgical kit assembled, scoped to safe layperson procedures only
- [ ] Community pet care pact formalized
- [ ] Barter pet supplies stockpiled separately from personal-use stock
- [ ] Practiced: at least one herbal remedy correctly identified, prepared, and administered at a known-safe dose

Tier 4: Sustainable Community

Goal: *Produced, at community scale. Build a community-wide pet care and sheltering network so no single household’s pets depend entirely on that household’s own supplies, skills, or survival.*

A single household's Tier 3 pet care plan still fails completely if that household is incapacitated, relocated, or lost; their pets have no fallback. Tier 4 distributes pet care capability across the community: shared knowledge, shared supplies, and a real plan for fostering or caring for pets whose people can't, temporarily or permanently.

Count how many households actually have pets and how real the local evacuation or displacement risk is before building a formal fostering network around it, not a vague sense that pet-owning neighbors should help each other. Then ask who's genuinely willing to foster an unfamiliar animal, species and allergy constraints included, and whether anyone actually has the supplies or reference material worth pooling.

Choosing an Approach

Three real models exist, and they fit different circumstances.

Approach	What it is	Fits when
Informal pet-sitting	Neighbors helping each other on an ad hoc basis, no roster or written agreement	A small, already-trusted group of pet owners
Organized fostering roster	A written roster of willing foster households with species/allergy constraints noted, a real fostering agreement, a shared first-aid cache	Real displacement risk and enough willing, compatible foster households
Formal shelter partnership	Active coordination with local animal shelters and humane societies on their existing disaster protocols	Sustained need, or a neighborhood ready to formalize ongoing shared sheltering

WARNING

Fostering Is a Compatibility and Liability Question, Not Just a Willingness One

An unfamiliar dog and a foster household's own pets can genuinely injure each other, and most jurisdictions regulate boarding or sheltering animals that aren't your own past a certain scale, a kennel or boarding-facility license, even when no money changes hands. An informal, occasional foster arrangement between neighbors during an actual emergency is a different thing than running an ongoing community pet shelter; check your local ordinance before the second one becomes a standing operation rather than a one-time favor.

Skills to Build

- **Distributed Pet First Aid:** Train more than one person in the community in pet first aid and basic triage, the same redundancy principle used for human medical responders in earlier chapters.

- **Building Real, Certified Handling Skill:** Continued shelter volunteering, well beyond a single first shift, builds pattern recognition across many different animals' stress responses that one household's own pets can't provide. Certified Professional Dog Trainer certification through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers requires 300 hours of documented training experience plus a knowledge-based exam, and is the recognized professional standard for dog training specifically. Veterinary technician training is a genuine multi-year path; look for a program accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association, and know that most states require passing the national Veterinary Technician National Exam regardless of whether your state separately licenses vet techs. Difficulty: High. Training: a real, documented certification program. Cost: $$-$$$.

- **Emergency Fostering Coordination:** Organize, in advance, who can temporarily foster pets if their household is incapacitated, evacuated separately, or lost. This needs to be arranged before it's needed, not improvised.

- **Community Breeding/Population Management:** For communities maintaining small livestock for food, coordinate breeding and population size across households to avoid overtaxing shared feed resources.

- **Reunification Coordination:** Extend the individual household's photo-ID system (Tier 1) to a community level: a shared, simple system for reuniting lost pets with owners across a wider area than one household can cover alone.

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For the hands-on how-to:

Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics

Tech & Equipment

- **Shared Pet Medical Cache:** A community-level stock of pet first aid and basic medical supplies beyond what any single household could reasonably stock alone.

- **Community Fostering Network Roster:** A simple, current list of households able and willing to foster, with any relevant constraints (species, allergies, space), same model as the caregiver and responder rosters in other chapters.
- **Shared Feed/Livestock Infrastructure:** Community-scale feed production or livestock housing if raising animals for pet/human protein at scale, coordinated rather than duplicated household-by-household.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Community pet supply reserve	Bulk food, medication, sanitation stock	Sized for the neighborhood, with clear access rules, same model as other chapters' shared reserves.
Fostering agreement templates	Simple written agreements	The Mutual Aid Agreement template adapts directly: covers expectations and duration if one household temporarily cares for another's pets.
Shared reference library	Pet first aid, nutrition, herbal medicine	Distributed across multiple households for redundancy.

Northern Utah Note

Local animal shelters and humane societies along the Wasatch Front (Salt Lake County Animal Services, Humane Society of Utah, and others) already coordinate on emergency sheltering during major incidents. Connecting with these organizations now, even just to understand their existing disaster protocols, is a faster path to a working Tier 4 plan than building one from scratch.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Multiple community members trained in pet first aid
- [ ] Emergency fostering network established and rostered, before it’s needed
- [ ] Community pet medical/supply cache established
- [ ] Reunification system extended to community scale

- [ ] Shared feed/livestock infrastructure coordinated if applicable
- [ ] Local kennel/boarding licensing rules checked before fostering scales past an occasional favor
- [ ] At least one household pursuing a real certified handling credential (dog training or vet tech), if community need is real
- [ ] Practiced: at least one fostering-network or reunification drill completed

At a Glance: Pet Evacuation & Shelter Across All Tiers

A single-page reference for planning purposes. This does not replace the detailed guidance above; use it to see how the plan scales, not as a standalone checklist.

Tier	Mode	Duration	Evacuation/Shelter Plan	Health & Nutrition
Tier 1	Stored	Hours – 14 days	Pre-packed kit, practiced loading, pet-friendly shelter list	14-day food/meds, first aid kit
Tier 2	Transition	2 weeks – 3 months	Sustained sheltering, triage without a vet	3-month bulk food/meds, homemade diet plan
Tier 3	Produced	Indefinite	Self-sufficient, community-integrated care	Local feed production, herbal remedies, basic surgery
Tier 4	Produced	Sustainable community	Shared fostering network, reunification system	Community pet supply reserve, distributed first aid