Severe weather and the threat of tornadoes is scary enough for humans, but imagine the impact it has on helpless house pets or livestock. As we prepare for thunderstorms and possible tornadoes this severe weather season, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) reminds everyone to take precautionary steps to safeguard your beloved animals in the unfortunate event of disaster.

"Most importantly, save yourself but don't leave your pets behind," says Dr. Robert Ehlenfeldt, DATCP's State Veterinarian. "Pets are unlikely to survive by themselves if left alone, so if you must evacuate your home take them with you if it is safe to do so." Livestock, on the other hand, isn't easily transportable, however, so do the best you can to safeguard them from dangers if you are forced to leave them behind, he says.

Following some simple steps can ensure that you don't put your animals in danger. The first step is to plan for an emergency before the emergency happens.

"Prepare for your animals just as you would prepare for yourself," Ehlenfeldt says. He advises preassembling an evacuation kit for your pet(s) including, at a minimum, enough pet food and supplies for at least 7 days and storing it in a place where you will have quick access to it. Similarly, make sure you provide enough feed and water for your livestock to last several days and give them a safe place to shelter through the storm.

Besides a pet evacuation kit, Ehlenfeldt recommends taking other steps to minimize the impact of a disaster on your pet's well-being.

Prior to and during a possible severe weather emergency:

- Bring your pets inside immediately. Never leave a pet outside or tied up during a storm. Pets instinctually isolate themselves when they are afraid. Bringing them inside early can stop them from running away.
- Have newspapers on hand for sanitary purposes. Feed the animal moist or canned food so they will need less water to drink.
- Separate dogs and cats. Even if your dogs and cats normally get along, the anxiety of an emergency situation can cause pets to act irrationally. Keep small pets away from cats and

dogs.

- For bird owners, make sure that the bird is caged and the cage is covered by a thin cloth or sheet to provide security and filtered light.
- Make sure you have your pet in a secure pet carrier, cage or other portable enclosure, so that if the animal panics, they can't escape.

When you are able to return home, you will be more than ready to give your animal the run of the house, but be careful. After a severe weather emergency:

- Leash your pets to maintain close contact when outdoors. Familiar scents will likely have been altered and your pet may become confused and lost. Dangerous objects and debris as well as snakes and other dangerous animals may be brought into the area and your home with flood waters. Downed power lines are another hazard.
- Watch your animals closely. The behavior of your pets may change after an emergency. Normally quiet and friendly pets may become aggressive or defensive. Leash dogs and place them in a fenced yard with access to shelter and water. Your pet may also become disoriented or stressed if the disaster completely rearranged your home.

 Safeguarding Pets & Livestock During a Severe Weather Emergency (PDF)

For additional information, please visit www.avma.org to download a free brochure entitled “Saving the Whole Family” or visit www.fema.gov. You can also learn more at www.datcp.wi.gov, on Facebook (www.facebook.com/widatcp) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/widatcp) as well.