



People for Animal Welfare in El Dorado County

Disaster Preparedness Tips: For Reptiles and Amphibians

Are you prepared to take care of your reptile or amphibian when a disaster strikes? If not, NOW is the time to stock up on the items that you will need so you will not be caught unprepared. Listed below is a handy shopping list for you to use. The next time you buy food or supplies for your herptile (reptile or amphibian), take this list with you. Don't put off doing what you should do now - it may just make the difference between being able to keep your herptile alive when a disaster strikes or losing it. Here are the supplies that you should have in a disaster kit for reptiles and amphibians. Adjust the amounts, depending on the number that you have. Please keep in mind that there are such varied needs for all the different species of reptiles and amphibians that you will need to be familiar with your particular species to know which items apply to you. It is very important to take your pets with you when you evacuate whenever possible. Plan ahead.

FOOD

Have at least a two (2) week supply at all times. Since you may not be able to obtain fresh vegetables or fruits during a disaster, keep frozen vegetables or fruit on hand for emergencies. It is a good idea to also have an ice chest to keep frozen vegetables or fruit in to keep them cold longer in case you are without power. Another alternative would be canned fruits and vegetables stored in their natural juices and with no salt added, or even baby food jars of fruits and vegetables. Be sure to try these foods on your own pet to make sure they will accept them as a food source prior to a disaster, so that you are not surprised with a pet that will not eat. Some species of reptiles have pelleted diets available as well. If using a pelleted diet, be sure to store in an airtight, water proof container and rotate food at least once every (3) months. If your herptile eats from a bowl, include one in your disaster kit, and if you are using canned fruits and vegetables, include a hand crank can opener. If your herptile is fed a live food, then remember to consider their needs for evacuation as well.

SUPPLEMENTATION

Many species of herptiles require additional diet supplements such as calcium or vitamins. Be sure to include these in your disaster kit.

WATER

Have at least a two (2) week supply. Store water in plastic containers and keep in a cool, dark place. Rotate water at least once every (2) months. Do not use distilled water. Since regular tap water has chemicals that can be toxic to herptiles, you will need to include dechlorinator drops in your kit. (This can be purchased at any aquarium supply store). Frozen dechlorinated water can be used as both a cooling agent in the ice chest and once it melts it can be used as a water source. Depending on the species, you may need a bowl for drinking or one large enough for the entire herptile to fit into (remember that many amphibians actually absorb water through their skin and need to be able to submerge themselves). Some herptiles will drink water droplets off of the sides of tanks or leaves. For these herptiles, you will need a spray bottle so that you can mist the tank to create these droplets. Remember to also dechlorinate this water as well. Spray bottles can also be good for helping to maintain a higher humidity for the herptiles that come from a more tropical climate. Another way to boost humidity and provide water droplets is to place some ice cubes on top of the screened top over plants – the melted water will drip down onto leaves for easy lapping. If your herptile is aquatic, then you will also want to include an air pump or “bubbler” to aerate the water if power is available.



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SUBSTRATE

The substrate you use will vary greatly depending on the species of herptile you have, and some species may not require one at all. Some herptiles will need a substrate that they can burrow into. This can be sterilized leaves, sphagnum moss or river sand. Another easy way to achieve this is with regular potting soil, but be sure that it does not contain any chemicals. Other substrates that can be used are unprinted newspaper, butcher paper, paper towels (for smaller species), pine chips (not cedar, which can be toxic), linoleum, Astroturf or reptile green carpet. Also keep in mind that many herptiles can ingest the substrate with their food and can cause impaction. For this reason, be sure that the substrate you choose is not small enough to be ingested. If using Astroturf or green carpet, it is a good idea to have two pieces so that one can replace the other when being cleaned.

HEAT SOURCE

All herptiles are ectotherms, meaning that they do not produce internal body heat. Instead their temperature is determined by their surrounding environment. There are several different alternatives to providing heat for your herptile. If it is an aquatic herptile, such as aquatic frogs, then you will want to include a submersible aquarium heater with thermostat, as well as a submersible thermometer. You may also choose to use an incandescent bulb with a clamp style lamp, ceramic heat emitters set up in porcelain sockets, heat lamp (for larger enclosures) or an under tank heater. You may even use a heating pad made for human use. Be sure to have the cage set up so that the heat source is at one end and that the herptile can move back and forth to a cooler end to regulate body temperature. Some people choose to use heat rocks, but be advised they are notorious for overheating and causing burns. If you must use a heat rock, then be sure to purchase one with a temperature regulator. Also, to help defuse the heat, you can attach a flat rock to the top with silicone sealer. If you are using a white light for daytime heat and if your herptile will also need heat during the evening, then have on hand a light made for nighttime use, as bright light more than 12-14 hours a day can cause additional stress to your herptile. If using lights for heat, be sure to keep them behind wire mesh to avoid burns if your herptile is able to climb. Do not try to guess the temperature in your enclosure: you must use thermometers. Ideally, one should be placed in both the cool and warm ends. Proper heat can also determine if your herptile will eat and if they will digest the foods they eat.

FULL-SPECTRUM UVB LIGHT

Most non-nocturnal herptiles will also need a full-spectrum UVB light source. This will give your herptile sufficient levels of UVA and UVB in order to allow vitamin D3 synthesis and utilization of calcium. Incandescent lights that are suitable for heat sources do not provide the full-spectrum required by many herptiles. Plant lights and most aquarium lights are wide-spectrum rather than full-spectrum. If you include an UVB light in your disaster kit, be sure to also include the lamp to hold the fluorescent tube/bulb.

EVACUATION CAGE

If your herptile enclosure is too large to take with you, then you will want to obtain an evacuation cage. If your herptile needs to have the temperature regulated, then a solid walled cage is often best, such as a small aquarium or plastic critter cage. Be sure that the lid fits securely and that there are no gaps anywhere in the cage, especially for snakes, as they are expert escape artists. Also, make sure that the cage has no sharp edges. If you have a wire cage, then you will want to include a towel or cover in your disaster kit to cover the cage in the event that you need to hold more heat inside. Also, if your herptile requires live foods, then you will also need an evacuation cage for those as well.



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CAGE ACCESSORIES

While cage accessories are not essential, they can greatly reduce the stress on your herptile during the disaster. Some of these would include a hide box – this can be a bowl, box, a flower pot turned on its side or even a log leaned up on the side of the enclosure. This provides a secluded place for your herptile to hide in or under, which can make it feel more secure. A flat, smooth rock to bask on, set under or over the main heat source. Wood logs that have been sanitized or artificial plants to climb on. Even live potted plants that are safe for herptiles.

MEDICATIONS

If your reptile is on long-term medication, always have on hand at least a two (2) week supply, since your vet may also be affected by the disaster and may not be able to fill prescriptions right away.

FIRST AID SUPPLIES AND BOOK FOR REPTILES/AMPHIBIANS

Check with your veterinarian to get a recommendation of what to include in your first aid kit. Some suggested items include antibiotic ointment like Silvadene, Betadine solution for cleansing and disinfecting, gauze for cuts and wounds, cornstarch to stop minor bleeding, tweezers and scissors and Q-tips.

CLEANING SUPPLIES

Include a small container of soap for washing out your herptile's food and water dish. Include some paper towels for drying the dishes and other cleanup of the enclosure. Include a disinfectant that can be used to clean the enclosure. Be sure to rinse all dishes/enclosures very well, as herptiles are very sensitive to chemicals ingested or absorbed through the skin.

ELECTRICAL CORD(S)

Remember to include a heavy duty electrical extension cord so that you can use your light or heat sources, as well as aquatic heaters & air pumps. An indoor/outdoor extension cord is best. Also remember that power may be out, and a generator is a good backup to have on hand.

ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES

In addition to having the above supplies, here are some other suggestions for keeping your herptile safe: If you are creating a water area for your herptile to climb into, be sure to include a slope or step for the herptile to be able to climb out of the water. Check to make sure your enclosure is secure. All opening doors/lids should be fastened to prevent them from opening during a disaster. Be sure you do not keep the enclosure under a shelf where objects might fall during a disaster. If using a metal cage, also keep a pair of pliers and wire in your disaster supplies to make any necessary repairs to the cage after a disaster. Take some recent pictures of your reptile or amphibian, including any distinguishing marks. This is to help locate your herptile should it get loose during a disaster. Include yourself in some of the pictures for proof of guardianship. If you have a larger reptile, then you may want to consider getting it microchipped. Check with your veterinarian for more information about this permanent form of identification. Also check with your veterinarian to see if he/she has a disaster plan should your herptile need emergency care following a disaster. Locate a back up veterinarian just in case yours is not available.



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Disaster Preparedness Tips: For Pocket Pets

Take your pets with you when you evacuate whenever possible. Plan ahead. Your pets need to have supplies for 4-7 days stored in a “Go Bag” or duffel bags that is conveniently located near the pets evacuation cage or regular cage if it is small enough. Pets will need: A one week supply of food, water, meds, bedding, and toiletry needs. Cooling or heating ability, if necessary, and a pet first aid kit. Towels, paper towels, baby wipes, garbage bags, gloves, etc., Laminated crate or cage tags with a photo of you with your pet and other basic information.

FOOD

Always have a reserve supply of the type of food your pet is used to eating that would last at least a week. Store seeds or pelleted feeds in original sealed bags or in seal-a-meal type storage. Rotate the foods every three months to make sure they stay fresh. Include with your disaster supplies an extra feeding dish, just in case the one normally used is lost. Include with your disaster supplies a spoon to scoop and/or mix food if indicated.

WATER

Have enough drinking water to last at least one week for each pet in your household. It may be easiest to buy bottled water in liter size or larger containers for ease of use and long term storage. Conversely you can put up your own water in a cool, dark location, but be sure to rotate it so it remains fresh, remember that if the tap water is not suitable for humans to drink, it is also not suitable for animals to drink. Include with your disaster supplies an extra water dish, just in case the one normally used is lost.

SANITATION

Include supplies to deal with your pets waste and contaminated bedding. Have some plastic bags in your supplies for disposing of the waste. Also have replacement bedding to last a week.

CLEANING SUPPLIES

Include with your disaster supplies a small container of soap for washing out your pet’s food dish. Include with your disaster supplies some paper towels for drying dishes and other cleanup as well as a disinfectant that can be used if needed.

EVACUATION CAGE

If your pocket pet enclosure is too large to take with you, then you will want to obtain an evacuation cage. Pocket pets are very sensitive to excess heat and humidity. So make sure your cage is securable and that you can provide the necessary ventilation to keep your pet cool. 2 liter soda bottles filled with water and frozen are very good tools for providing cooling especially when combined with a fan. They also offer an alternative fresh water source when they melt.

CAGE ACCESSORIES

While cage accessories are not essential, they can greatly reduce the stress on your pet during the disaster. One useful item of these would include a hide/nest box, a second would be some sort of toy or entertainment like a walking wheel. This provides a secluded place for your pocket pet to hide in, and something to keep them entertained.



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MEDICATIONS

If your pet is on long term medication, always have on hand at least a (2) week supply, since your vet may not be able to open right away to fill a prescription. Check with your veterinarian to see if he/she has a disaster plan - if not find a veterinarian in your area who does have a plan so that you can get medical care for your pet should it get injured during the disaster. Keep your pet's medical records, including records of vaccinations with your disaster supplies.

PICTURES

You should have in your supplies some current pictures of your pet to use in case your they get lost during the disaster - be sure to include yourself in some of the pictures in case you have to show proof of guardianship.