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Weather Emergencies, Natural Disasters, and AWA-Regulated Facilities

Last Modified:

AWA-regulated facilities can plan for weather emergencies and other natural disasters to safeguard the welfare of animals in their care and the resilience of their business.

Know Your Risks

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Drought

Droughts may result in shortages in the water and food supply, can lead to concurrent natural hazards such as wildfires, and can impact a region for years.

- Dependency on only one type of food source such as drought-vulnerable grasses or crops can put the health and welfare of your animals at risk.
- Parched landscapes can bring increased risk of fire.

- Water may not be readily available to fight fires.
- Lack of fire breaks around animal housing structures leave them in harm's way.
- Failure to have safe evacuation routes and sites could mean catastrophic loss in a fire event.

Temperature Extremes

Extreme heat and cold may affect the health and well-being of both animals and people. In combination with other hazards, such as drought or wildfires, extreme heat can be devastating to a community.

- Winter storms may interrupt power or water for days or weeks.
- Heat stress (hyperthermia) and cold stress (hypothermia) can strike your animals, visitors, and staff.
- High temperatures, especially if there is no shade, shelter, and fresh water, can especially stress young and senior animals and those with special health needs.
- Animals housed outdoors during winter storms and extreme cold can lose body heat if they don't have draft-free shelters large enough to allow normal postural movements.
- Drinking water can freeze in winter.

Fire, Storms, and Floods

Wind and storms are not just a coastal danger during hurricanes. High winds, heavy rain, flooding, and tornados can happen far inland. There is usually advanced warning which can allow for time to prepare for evacuation. In contrast, urban and wildland fires can happen anywhere at any time, with very little warning, and move very quickly, despite plans such as prioritizing which animals will be evacuated ahead of time.

- Lack of transport and prearranging a safe destination can leave your animals without an escape plan.
- Leaving small animals such as dogs, cats, goats, and small exotics indoors for protection may not be as helpful as you expect without access to plenty of food and water if you cannot return.

- Lack of a practiced evacuation plan can leave your animals without water, feed, hay, and veterinary supplies.
- Restraining large animals when left behind does not allow them to seek large pastures on high ground that are free of debris, large objects, and power lines.
- Depending on the types of animals you leave behind and their needs, you may need to plan for a human "ride-out" team and how they will safely shelter in place as the storm blows through.

General Recommendations for Regulated Facilities

Licensees and registrants should educate themselves on how disasters may impact their facilities and communities. Numerous resources on preparing for weather emergencies and other natural disasters can be found below. Reviewing these resources can help you identify critical issues that could impact your facility. We recommend that you consider these issues when reviewing and making updates to your facility's contingency plan. By planning for these potential extremes, you can help to mitigate the impact of a natural disasters on animals, staff, and property.

USDA highly encourages you to build relationships with local, State, and Federal emergency management partners to stay informed of potential hazards and be able to share resources when disasters occur. Most disasters don't happen in a vacuum. Emergency response is a highly choreographed activity, and understanding how your facility folds into it can help your business survive an emergency event. Remember that partnering now can mean getting help later when your facility really needs it. For example, offering up some of your parking lot space for a staging or storage area during a local response could mean your local law enforcement knows exactly where your facility is when you need to evacuate your animals.

Below is a list of considerations for some common weather-related disasters.

Considerations	General	Drought	Heat	Winter Storm, Storm Tornado	Fire Flood
Conserve water and have alternative water sources					

Considerations		General	Drought	Heat	Winter Storm	Storm, Tornado	Fire	Flood
Have alternative food sources for pastured animals when grasses and crops are scarce								
Plan for evacuation								
Recognize the signs of heat illness in animals and people, especially for young and older animals and those with special health conditions								
Provide animals adequate shade and shelter								
Provide sources of fresh water for animals, staff, and visitors								
Have a cooling plan for individuals with heat illness (include a cool location, medical treatment, and possible transport)								
Have a current written contingency plan that everyone knows and has practiced								
Provide a copy of your contingency plan and animal inventory to local emergency management								
Know evacuation zones, routes, and methods								

Considerations		General	Drought	Heat	Winter Storm	Storm, Tornado	Fire	Flood
Have an evacuation site for animals with agreements in place (discuss biosecurity issues in advance)								
Keep trailers and vehicles in good working condition								
Ensure fencing and buildings are built strong and are in good repair to prevent flying debris								
Fill large vessels such as troughs or bins with water to keep them from blowing away								
Store liquid fuel and other chemicals in secure locations								
Protect feed and hay supplies from wind, rain, and standing water								
Prepare for power outages; have an alternate power source (such as a generator) available if your animals need power to survive								
Stores of items such as fence repair supplies, chain saws, and fuel are also helpful as these items may also be difficult to acquire if supply channels are disrupted								

Considerations	General	Drought	Heat	Winter Storm	Storm, Tornado	Fire	Flood
Pay attention to emergency information and alerts. If you live in a mandatory evacuation zone and are told to evacuate, do so immediately.							
Wait until conditions are safe to check on your animals.							
Do not return evacuated animals until conditions are safe.							
Assess your animals and building structures after the storm.							
Contact your veterinarian if any animals are injured.							
Look for damage, stability issues, loose debris, and safety issues at your facility. Make emergency repairs to keep your animals safe and contained. Stay away from downed powerlines.							
Provide animals with clean water and uncontaminated food.							

Considerations	General	Drought	Heat	Winter Storm, Storm Tornado	Fire	Flood
Check in with local and State authorities if any of your animals have escaped or if deaths result in animal carcass disposal needs.						
Maintain a current written animal inventory for your facility and identify animals (microchip, ear tag, tattoo, collars, photos).						
Have equipment available (such as halters, leads, and trailers) and in good condition to recapture escaped animals						
Bring animals into a barn or shelter well in advance of a storm, if possible, and provide plenty of food and water. Build strong shelters that can withstand high wind and heavy rain.						
Never leave animals tied up outside in any manner such that they cannot escape danger.						
Keep a 3 to 5 day supply of food and potable water on hand for all animals, along with any necessary medications.						

Considerations

General Drought Heat

Winter Storm, Storm Tornado Fire Flood

Keep extra crates on hand to temporarily house or move smaller sized animals.



Sign up for your community's warning system or have a NOAA Weather Radio on hand if you live in an area with a greater risk of tornadoes.



Focus on keeping yourself, your family, and your employees safe. Injured people have limited ability to protect animals in their care.



[See More](#) [See Less](#)

Learn More

The following websites may help you prepare your facility for weather-related challenges.

- [Extreme Heat | Ready.gov](#)
- [Extreme Heat | CDC](#)
- [Extreme Heat | EPA](#)
- [Zoo and Aquarium All Hazards Partnership](#)
- [Drought Preparedness & Water Conservation | Red Cross](#)
- [Drought | Ready.gov](#)
- [Drought Makes Its Home on the Range | NASA](#)
- [Hazard Planning & Preparedness | Drought.gov](#)
- [Ready.gov](#)
- [Natural Disaster: Animal Preparation and Response](#)
- [Prepare Livestock and Animals Ahead of Severe Weather](#)

- [Tornadoes and Your Livestock](#)
- [Tornadoes and Your Pets](#)
- [Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery](#)

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