

TORNADO
SHELTER



Preparing Your Fur Family for Severe Weather: A Texas Guide

Written by: Brandi DeAngelo

Cows lie down. Birds fly low. Sheep headbutt. All telltale signs of inclement weather, yet humans rely on the knowledge of scientists and predictive technology to know when there is a storm.

Though some animals can predict the weather, like us, many are far from prepared. Pet owners must prepare their households for unpredictable storms that could harm or severely traumatize our four-legged friends.

Texas faces many kinds of weather challenges because of its geography and location. For example, Texas experiences record-breaking heat waves; these temperatures can often rise because of climate change. The number of days the temperature can reach over 100 degrees [has doubled over the last few decades](#). This extreme heat is not only dangerous for humans, but it's often deadly for animals that live outdoors.

No stranger to storms, Texas experiences many hurricanes and tornadoes that cause significant damage to homes, buildings, roads, and power grids. Flooding in urban areas is expected to rise by 50% over the next 15 years from rainstorms and severe flooding. Considering [83.7% of Texas is urban](#), and 58% of Texan households own at least one pet, it's important to prepare our homes for ourselves and our fur families.

Common Weather Threats in Texas



Texas, because of its vast size and diverse geography, has a variety of weather threats. The state's weather can be as unpredictable as it is severe, with risks ranging from extreme heatwaves to violent thunderstorms, tornadoes, and hurricanes.

During summer, Texas experiences intense heat, which is why it's known for heatwaves. Heatwaves are common and can lead to record-breaking temperatures. Use the [HeatRisk tool](#) to know your risks. Without precautions and proper protection, heat poses a significant risk to both humans and pets, potentially leading to heat exhaustion, heat stroke, or death.

Thunderstorms: Texas experiences a high frequency of thunderstorms, particularly in the spring and fall. These storms can bring heavy rain, high winds, and even hail. They can cause flash flooding and property damage and pose a threat to outdoor pets.

Tornadoes: Texas is part of Tornado Alley and experiences a high number of tornadoes each year. These powerful storms can cause extensive damage and pose a significant risk to both people and pets.

Hurricanes: The Texas Gulf Coast is susceptible to hurricanes. These massive storm systems can bring high winds, heavy rain, and storm surge, leading to widespread flooding and damage.

The impact of this weather on pets can be significant. Pets can suffer from heat-related illnesses during heatwaves, and thunderstorms can cause anxiety. Tornadoes and hurricanes pose a direct threat to pets' safety, particularly if they are outside or families do not have a disaster plan that includes their pets.

Severe Weather Pet Preparation

Preparing your pet's home for severe weather is crucial to ensuring the safety of your family and pets. This includes having a disaster plan in place, securing furniture or decorations outdoors that could become projectiles in high winds, and ensuring the environment your pet lives in can withstand the impact of severe weather.

This may mean having a safe space for them during storms and including them in any evacuation plans you make. Here are some questions to ask when you prepare your evacuation plan:

1. **Do you have enough pet carriers to hold the animals in your household?** You should ensure you have at least one per animal and can carry them or transport them safely in an emergency.
2. **Do they need life-sustaining medications?** Are medications up to date? If your furry friend requires medications, it's important to have extra or store them in an easy-to-grab location on your way to safety. Don't forget the medical records, as well!
3. **Do you have the necessities ready?** The [American Red Cross recommends](#) having an emergency kit packed with your pet's preferred food, drinking water, bowls, cat litter, and a manual can opener.
4. **Do you have at least one picture of your pet?** If your pet runs away, you should have a picture handy to identify them. Remember—animals don't always understand what is happening and may run to a place they feel safe (even if that isn't where you want them to stay). Having a printed or digital picture of your animal is important in case they get lost.
5. **Do you have your pet?** The ASPCA found that [47% of pet owners](#) who evacuated left at least one pet at home. That is over 1 in 5 pet owners. "32% of pet owners said they left behind at least one dog, 20% left behind at least one cat, and 8% at least one horse/equine," according to the ASPCA survey.



You might be familiar with the reminder, “Keys, wallet, phone.” Similarly, for your pet’s evacuation plan, think **PET: Prescriptions, Essentials, Tails**. This will help ensure you have everything your pet needs in an emergency.

Pet Emergency Kit Supplies

Having a well-stocked emergency kit for your pet is essential. Since time is of the essence during an emergency, having a grab bag can help during an incident when every second matters. Here are some recommendations:

1. **Food and Water:** Have at least a week’s worth of food and water for your pet. You may need to include a can opener if the food is canned.
2. **Medication:** If your pet takes any medication, keep at least a 30-day supply on hand. Also, include any special dietary foods, if applicable.
3. **First Aid Kit:** Include a basic pet first aid kit with bandages, antiseptic, tweezers, a digital thermometer, and a pet first aid book.

Creating a Safe Space Indoors

When severe weather strikes, having a safe and comfortable space for your pets indoors is crucial. Here are some tips for preparing your home against storms and extreme heat.

1. **Secure Loose Items:** These can become dangerous projectiles during a storm.
2. **Provide Cool Spaces:** Ensure your pet can access cool spaces during extreme heat. This could be a tiled floor, shade, a fan, or an air-conditioned space.
3. **Close Windows and Doors:** Keep windows and doors closed to prevent your pet from escaping during a storm and to keep the heat out during a heatwave. It’s a good idea to put all pets in crates even if you are sheltering in a room or basement. It helps protect them and keep them from escaping if the building is damaged.

During severe weather, it's important to have a safe, accessible indoor area for your pets. This area should be away from windows and potential flying debris. It should be comfortable for your pet, with toys, treats, food, water, and a litter box for cats. Because your pet will be stressed, do what you can to make them more comfortable!

Remember, our pets rely on us for their safety. By taking these steps, you can ensure that your pet will be safe and comfortable during severe weather.



Outdoor Pet Safety: Essential Tips

Providing adequate shade and shelter is most important when safeguarding our furry companions during outdoor activities. You should also ensure they have enough food and water to sustain them during inclement weather. Here are some options to keep your fur friend happy outdoors.

Create Shaded Spots

Set up umbrellas, tarps, tents, or other structures in your yard to create shaded spots. These areas should be easily accessible to your pets, especially during peak sun hours. ["If it's too hot for you, it's too hot for them."](#)

Build or Invest in Dog Houses and Cat Shelters

Consider investing in well-ventilated dog houses or cat shelters for outdoor pet safety. These structures protect them from the sun and rain, ensuring a comfortable place to stay. In an emergency, use whatever you can (such as the kiddie tent providing food, water, and shade) while cleaning up after a severe storm.

Use Cooling Mats and Pads

Explore cooling mats or pads designed specifically for pets. These products contain cooling gel or materials that absorb heat, providing relief from hot surfaces. Evaporative coolers are inexpensive to operate and may provide a cooler outdoor area for kids and pets. This type of cooler works even when the humidity is up to 65%. It's a great back up for homes in case of an air conditioning outage too.

Provide Access to Water

Ensuring that your pets have constant access to fresh water during hot weather is crucial. For instance, with regular dry kibble, you can offer wet food to keep them hydrated. Wet food has a [higher water content](#) and can help keep your pets hydrated. (You can even mix more water with the wet food if they're especially stubborn about hydration.) In addition, place water bowls in different areas of your yard. This way, your pets can easily find water wherever they are playing or resting and a spilled bowl doesn't leave them without a source of water.

Have Safe Outdoor Enclosures

Creating secure enclosures is essential to protect pets from strong winds and debris. Consider the following ideas:

- Install sturdy fencing around your yard to prevent pets from wandering into unsafe areas. You should inspect the fence regularly to make sure it's intact. If your pet digs, there are inexpensive ways to keep them from digging out.
- Use outdoor pens or playpens to create safe spaces for your pets. I particularly love net tents that allow my cat to look out of the net but still stay protected from the sun and keep the cat confined to a safe place. Remember to anchor these enclosures, protect them from the elements, and supervise the animals while using this type of enclosure.

What to Avoid

1. Have you ever stepped on hot concrete as a kid? It's not fun. The same goes for your pet; they may act tough, but their paw pads are sensitive! Avoid walking your pet on hot concrete and sun-bathed pavement that may raise their internal temperature or burn their skin. Grassy areas are best to walk on, along with turf or other surfaces that do not absorb the heat from the sun. There are also dog booties if your canine companion isn't fussy. Make sure your pets have cool areas to walk on if they're outside during hot summer days.
2. DO NOT LEAVE YOUR ANIMAL IN YOUR VEHICLE. Your car can reach extreme temperatures even with the windows cracked, and the longer you wait, the hotter it gets. After one hour, your car can rise over 40 degrees higher than the temperature outside, according to the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#). If there is an emergency and you *have to* leave your animal in your car, keep the temperature in mind before you do.

Monitor Your Pet's Health During Severe Weather

It's important to monitor your health and your pet's health during a weather emergency. For instance, you should be vigilant for [heatstroke](#) during the peak of summer and your pet's [stress level](#) during a thunderstorm.

Food, water, and first aid supplies should be close to the recommended shelter area in your home if you have no other type of safe space. If you have a storm shelter, check your supplies yearly to remove out-of-date supplies and be sure medications and emergency information are current. It doesn't take much room to install a storm shelter in a garage (like below). These are ideal for kids, pets, elderly, and handicapped persons who can't access outside and below-ground shelters. The shelter shown has an EF 5 rating.



FAQs About Pet Safety in Severe Weather

- *How can I tell if my pet is overheating?* The typical [symptoms](#) of heat exhaustion in pets are excessive panting, fast heart rate, dehydration, reddened gums, vomiting, diarrhea, stumbling or disorientation, weakness, and seizures. Animals with heart disease and obesity are more likely to experience overheating. In addition, dogs with small snouts/noses (pugs, boxers, etc.) are more susceptible to heat exhaustion, as their breathing is more difficult to regulate than most canines.
- *What should I include in my pet's emergency kit?* Food, water, medications, and first aid are most important for a pet emergency kit. You also may need a picture of your pet and their medical history records/tags.
- *How can I keep my pet calm during a thunderstorm?* Minimize their exposure to the storm as much as possible. You can close the windows, curtains, and doors to muffle the

frightening noises that the storm makes to keep your pet more at ease. During thunderstorms, try to distract them with food, toys, or training. Positive reinforcement through petting and soothing sounds may help combat anxiety, and calming activities allow for a more peaceful experience for your fur friend.

- *How do you keep pets safe during an emergency?* When you need to take shelter and cannot access a safe location, search for your nearest pet-friendly shelter. Some evacuation shelters take pets and animals during inclement weather emergencies. In any situation, you should have a list prepared with nearby pet-friendly evacuation shelters.



Pet-Friendly Preparedness in Extreme Weather

As pet owners, our responsibility extends beyond companionship. Preparing and remaining vigilant for our furry friends is crucial during extreme weather.

Preparation is important. Proactive preparation is key, whether it's heat, thunderstorms, or cold. Have a plan in place to keep your pets safe and comfortable. You can even print out guides or create quick checklists to help you in case of an emergency.

Provide them with shelter, shade, and hydration during heat waves. Ensure your pets have access to shaded areas, cooling shelters, and fresh water. You can also use wet food to keep them hydrated on hot days.

Secure your environment with fencing and safe outdoor enclosures to protect pets from heat, cold, wind, and other natural conditions that may endanger pets and livestock. By implementing these measures, we can ensure they enjoy the outdoors while staying protected, even during reasonable weather.

Understanding the [weather risks in your area](#) and being prepared can make all the difference when severe weather strikes you and your fur family. Feel free to share this valuable information with fellow pet owners and let's keep our pets safe and happy. Stay safe, Texas! 🐾 🐾