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## **Missing pet adds to storm trauma for some families**

A missing family pet is sometimes part of the trauma that comes with tornado and storm damage. If your pet is currently missing, it's probably close to home, says Laurie Greene, veterinarian with the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

"Most dogs and cats will try to stay close to their homes, or will try to return to their homes even if the house was damaged or destroyed," says Greene. "If your pet is missing it may be trapped in a basement or damaged room or hiding in house debris. Therefore, it's a good idea to check your house site often, call your pet's name often, and leave food and water nearby to entice the animal out. Your pet may be too frightened to respond to you at first, but eventually you should hear or see it if it's in the area."

Greene recommends contacting your local and state animal shelters and humane societies with descriptions of your missing pets. Visit the shelters often to see if your pets have been found. "In areas with widespread damage, it may take weeks or months to find all the missing pets and reunite them with their families," she points out.

Once you have found your pet, Greene has the following recommendations for providing care:

- Lack of food for several days is usually not harmful to most dogs, cats, and larger reptiles. However, contact with contaminated food and water can cause illnesses, especially in the digestive tract. Your pets especially need access to clean water.
- If your dogs or cats develop diarrhea and you are unable to see your veterinarian promptly, you can give the animals kapectate. Use a dose of one teaspoon per ten pounds body weight up to three times a day to stop the diarrhea. Do not use other human anti-diarrhea medications besides kapectate, however. Many of them contain medications that are harmful to pets.
- Some pets may have been injured in the tornado or storm. Be careful handling any injured animal. Even if it knows you, it may bite and scratch you due to fear and pain. Use a blanket to cover and wrap the animal before you try to move it. This will help prevent injury to you and the animal. Injured animals need immediate veterinary attention.
- You may not have a supply of pet food available. A good temporary substitute for dogs, cats, and reptiles is a 50-50 mixture of a protein food such as hamburger, chicken, or cottage cheese mixed with a starch such as rice, potatoes, or pasta. Macaroni and cheese is another short-term diet replacement for animals. Most pets will readily eat these homemade mixtures.
- If your pet is routinely on medication such as insulin or epilepsy medication, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Your pet may have some critical health care needs that should be addressed promptly if it has been without medication for days. Also, your veterinarian can advise

you on safely getting your pet back onto needed medication, as the dosage may need adjustment at first.

- Your pet may have been exposed to contaminated storm water and unknown chemicals spread on the ground by the storm. Therefore, a gentle cleansing shampoo to remove contaminants from fur is a good idea.

For more information, contact your county extension office, or the Veterinary Outreach Office of the U of M College of Veterinary Medicine at (800) 380-8636.

*Greene is a faculty member in the College of Veterinary Medicine.*

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