

How to Evacuate Several Pets at a Time

“Always have an evacuation plan and practice it at least once.”

The spring of 2000 will always stick in my mind as the summer of fires. I owned twenty-five dogs and one cat at that time, and a few scant hours after the forest fire started nearby, I knew I'd have to [evacuate](#). But how do you evacuate that many pets? And where do you stay?

If you have more than one or two pets, you're likely to run into the same conundrum I did during those and subsequent fires. The sheer logistics of handling many pets at once can be mind-boggling, especially if not all of the pets get along. Even if they do, you're probably still in for a rough time.

Planning To Leave

Let's say you have more than the average household when it comes to pets. How are you going to get them safely out when a disaster strikes? The first thing to do is plan for an evacuation, whether you have one or twenty dogs. If possible, don't have more pets than you can realistically evacuate at any time. If you have a little compact car and five Newfoundlands, you better start rethinking your mode of transportation. If two of your Newfoundlands don't get along, you're going to have to plan to accommodate at least one crate.

If you truly have a kennel or cattery full of pets, you're going to have to think in terms of how to get them all out. Musers and greyhound racing owners have solved this problem by having trucks specially built with a compartment for each dog. The downside of this is the expense, which can be thousands of dollars. A cheaper alternative is a truck with travel crates bolted or lashed to the bed. Don't plan on doing this at the last minute – it will take too much time. Practice it long before the disaster strikes.

Always have an [evacuation plan](#) and practice it at least once. In my own situation, we thought we'd take twenty minutes to load all the animals. Instead, it took twice that long – forty minutes – even though we'd prepared for it. The traffic was bad too – a quick trip down the mountain should have taken half an hour. Instead, it took us nearly an hour.

Where Will You Go?

You may find that people you would normally count on in disasters may not be so enthusiastic when taking in so many pets. Arrange ahead of time for boarding with friends outside of the possible danger area, and don't rely on just one friend if possible. Better yet, have a backup plan with a kennel that will give you a discount on boarding if you can't find anyone else to help you. Call the kennel the moment you may need boarding to get them prepared to receive your pets.

In my own situation, we relied on several places – a friend's house, a boarding kennel, and a veterinarian. Even with a plan, the circumstances were not ideal. Remember that pets can get lost and disoriented, even in safe places, so be sure to have tags and permanent identification, such as a microchip, on your pets at all times.

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