

What Happens to Your Pet if Something Happens to You

Emergency planning is even more important if you have a multi-pet family. Someone may be willing to take one animal in an emergency, but not two or ten.

Cindy doted on Sir Boots. She knew she wouldn't be able to stand it if anything happened to her cat. But one day, Cindy became ill and was taken to the hospital. While battling pneumonia, she was startled by her own vulnerability. Boots had been weak as a kitten, too, and Cindy couldn't stop worrying about her cat while she spent time away from him in the hospital. She called her neighbor, who promised to go over twice a day and fill the food and water bowls and clean the litter box. But what if Cindy's illness had been fatal or debilitating? The neighbor couldn't be expected to continue this routine forever.

After Cindy returned home, cuddled Sir Boots and thanked her neighbor, she sat down to determine how she could protect her pet if she was in an accident or became unable to care for him any longer. First, she called family and friends, making a list of those who would be able to take – and love – her cat. The next project was to make arrangements for permanent care, just in case.

Making a Plan

First, find the people in your life who would provide the best home for your pet (besides you, of course!) and obtain their permission to put them on your emergency list. Introduce these people to your cat(s) or dog(s) to ensure a satisfactory match. It's a good idea to also find someone who will be able to take an animal on the spot if the chosen caretaker is not available. If not, someone may call Animal Control Services to take your pet to a [shelter](#) in the interim.

You may decide to provide a small trust for your pet for food and other expenses. Don't make the trust so large, however, that your aunt's third husband decides to challenge the bequest!

If your pet is extremely elderly, in ill health or aggressive to others, you may need to make an alternative plan. Is it fair to saddle another person with the responsibility? Is it even possible? Don't leave a difficult decision to others who may not have your pet's best interests at heart.

Spread the Word

The person you name as caretaker may not be the same one who takes initial custody of your pet. Make sure your wishes regarding your pet have been documented and filed with your other important papers. Remember though, these files may not be reviewed until days or weeks after you can no longer care for your pet. In the meantime, your pet could suffer. To ensure that your pet is taken care of, give a copy of your wishes to your relatives, close friends, neighbors and veterinarian.

Include a description and picture, name, age, medical history, permanent identification and veterinarian contact information on the emergency paperwork for each pet. Provide information on feeding, medications, habits, idiosyncrasies and anything that's pertinent to the comfort and well being of your pet.

Emergency planning is even more important if you have a multi-pet family. Someone may be willing to take one animal in an emergency, but not two or ten. Be a Boy Scout when it comes to those you love – be prepared.