

# My Emergency Preparedness Guide

A Guide for Individuals and Families Who Depend on Service Animals



## Everyone Should Have A Plan

If in the event of a catastrophe or natural disaster, individuals who are blind or otherwise disabled depend on their service animals even more than they do day-to-day. While most people understand the need for a personal or family disaster plan, it is important not to forget to prepare a disaster plan for their animal companions. The most common service animals are dogs and although this guide is focused on service dogs, the information is applicable to most service animals.

The Federal Register of February 22, 1991 defines a service animal as "...any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability...[but] providing minimal protection or rescue work (Federal Register, April 22, 1991)." Maryland's service animal law applies to guide dogs, signal dogs, and other animals that are individually trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities, such as pulling a wheelchair, alerting upon the onset of a seizure, picking up dropped items, alerting to certain sounds, guiding someone who is visually impaired, or providing minimal protection or rescue work.

It is important to plan ahead and locate shelters, hotels or other facilities that will accept service/working animals in case of an emergency. This is the first step in developing a comprehensive disaster plan. However, as Bev Thompson writes in the newsletter for *AnythingPawsable*, an advocacy organization for Service and Working Dogs, "The likelihood that you and your animals will survive a fire, flash flood, hurricane, tornado, or even a terrorist attack partly depends on how prepared you are, and being prepared starts with learning how to create a disaster plan that includes your Service Dogs, Working K9s and/or pets (August 27, 2013)."

## Building an Animal Companion Disaster Plan

Basic planning begins with the development of an animal emergency supply kit and an animal care buddy system. What is usually best for you will also be best for your animal. Thus, whether you decide to stay at home for a given period-of-time or evacuate to another location, your decision should include what is best for your animal. Keep in mind that you will most likely have no more than 10 to 15 minutes to respond to an emergency (Thompson).

## Who to Call

Keep your home care/hospice company's number near the phone in case you need help. In a true emergency, call 9-1-1

**To be prepared for a disaster or emergency, consider the following actions:**

- Decide where you will go or if you will shelter in place. Try to avoid going to a shelter, if possible. A shelter environment is difficult for a person with disabilities, and it may stress your animal and prohibit him/her from being able to help you. Instead, identify a friend or relative with whom you can stay and make arrangements in advance for them to come get you if you cannot get to them.
- The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require assistance animals to wear identifying gear in public, however it is helpful to have such equipment. In case of a disaster, it may help to identify you and/or your animal. Develop a buddy system with a neighbor or friend to ensure that someone can help you and your service animal evacuate if necessary.
- Make sure that your animal's vaccinations are up to date and documented.
- Get your animal used to crowds or unusual services so that he or she does not cringe or freeze in crowds or if it hears loud noises.
- Make sure your animal is wearing a comfortable collar with the appropriate tags attached.
- Put together a "go bag" for your service animal. *A list is provided on the following page.*

# Your "To Go" Bag for Your Service Animal



**Non-perishable food**



**A manual can opener**



**Food and water dishes**



**Bottled water**



**Your animal's medications**



**Vet records**



**A carrier or crate**



**A muzzle** – (NOTE: Some places will only allow service dogs if they are muzzled.)



**Microchip data** – if applicable.



**A picture of you and your animal** – this helps to prove ownership if you become separated. Include a picture in your go bag as well.



**A favorite toy or comfort object**



**Pee pads** – in case you are not able to get a dog outside fast enough (NOTE: A litter tray and litter, if your animal is a cat.)



**First aid kit**



**A choke collar** – (NOTE: Some places will only allow service dogs if the owner has a choke collar to control the animal.)

## More Information and Online Resources

### ■ US Support Animals

The Official US Service Animal & Support Animal (ESA) Registry. Register Your Service Animal, Emotional Support Animal, or Apply for a Letter from a Licensed Mental Health Professional for Airline Travel & Housing. They provide comprehensive rules and guidelines for using service animals, especially dogs.

**Web site:** [usserviceanimals.org](http://usserviceanimals.org), **Phone:** (985) 441-4023

### ■ American Service Pets

They certify support animals and provides ESA letters.

**Web site:** [certification.americanservicepets.com](http://certification.americanservicepets.com)

**Most important,** remember that a catastrophe or disaster that makes you feel stressed and afraid also makes your animal stressed and afraid. Being ready to take care of your animal in the event of such a crisis will make both of you feel safer and in control, and your animal will be better able to help you.

## Resources

1. Americans with Disabilities Act. Federal Register, February 22, 1991
2. AnythingPawsable.com – Bev Thompson. How to Create a Disaster Plan for Service and Working Dogs
3. Humanity Road. Disaster Planning and Response for Service Animals. March 26, 2013
4. NOLO.com. Lisa Guerin, J.D. Maryland Laws on Service Dogs and Emotional Support Animals: Under Maryland and federal law, you may bring a service animal into housing or any public place.

Provided in partnership by the Maryland Department of Health  
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WRITE THE NAME AND PHONE  
NUMBER OF YOUR HOME CARE/  
HOSPICE COMPANY IN THIS BOX.