**Shelter Issues & Pet-Friendly Shelters**

**Shelter space**
There is a substantial shelter space deficit throughout Southwest Florida. Anyone with a safe place to go should plan to use that location instead of a public shelter. Shel­ters will be open for those with no other place to go.

Not all shelters open for every storm and only those shelters that are safe from the direction and intensity of each storm will open. If a person’s home is in the evacuation zone, the shelter closest to it likely also would be in the evacuation zone, and would not be safe. Local radio and television will broadcast the names of open shelters.

Shelters offer only basic life sustaining necessities: shelter from the weather, water, food and sanitary services. Shelters are not able to provide any conveniences or luxuries. They are not hotels. It is possible that the electricity will go out during part of your stay in the shelter.

Pets are not allowed at public shelters. Dogs and cats may be sheltered in Lee County’s Pet-Friendly Shelter and the Special Care shelter.

Service Animals are allowed in all shelters. Service Animals are trained to perform a service for their owners, and are not pets.

Food and water will be available, but there may be a slight delay in initial service. If you want or need special food items, bring them with you.

Register with shelter staff when arriving and check out when leaving for any reason.

Having a positive attitude will be helpful to everyone. Having to go to a shelter in advance of a hurricane is stressful for all. Shelters are crowded and noisy. Being considerate will help remind others to do the same. Consider volunteering to help the shelter staff.

Below are some items to consider bringing when going to a shelter:

* Drinking Water (Initially)
* Snacks or special foods
* Lawn chair or bed roll
* Books, magazines or electronic entertainment item with headphones
* Medications (prescription & over the counter)
* Change of clothing/personal hygiene items

Listen for official information and do not participate in rumors or gossip. Ask the shelter staff for clarification, if necessary.

Weapons, smoking and alcoholic bever­ages are prohibited at all shelters.

**Pet-friendly shelter**

In a hurricane, pets are subject to the same hazards as we are and have many of the same needs. Remember, public shelters do not permit pets. The best plan is to identify a safer location that allows pets such as a friend’s home or hotel. That way, you can keep your pets with you when you evacuate. There are many websites that can help locate hotels that accept pets, www.petswelcome.com is one.

South Fort Myers High School is Lee County's pet-friendly shelter. The shelter is managed by Lee County Domestic Animal Services. The shelter is first come, first served for those in the evacuation zone. No pre-registration is required. East Lee County High School may also open as a pet-friendly shelter.

You should have a supply kit for your pets. Include non-perishable food; water and medications; a sturdy cage or carrier to comfortably hold your pet; a collar; and leash. Make sure all vac­cinations are up-to-date and bring a copy of the records. Also, keep several photos to help identify your pet should you become separated. Place iden­tification on your pet’s collar or consider using a microchip to identify your pet.

**ITEMS TO REMEMBER:**

* Never leave a pet outside during a storm.
* Never leave a cat with a dog, even if the two are friends.
* Confine and keep small pets (birds, hamsters, etc.) away from cats and dogs.
* Dangerous animals should be secured in special crates or cages.
* Any animals posing a danger will be at risk of being destroyed.
* All animal facilities in the path of a hurricane are subject to some degree of damage or flooding. Keep in mind, boarding kennels may be without elec­tricity or potable water and have limited personnel and supplies for days or weeks following a disaster.
* If you have exotic pets, check with your veterinarian for suggestions on shelters for them.

If you plan and prepare early before hurricanes are threatening, you and your pets will be ready when the storms arrive.

More information on the pet-friendly shelter can be found at www.LeeLostPets.com or by calling 239-533-7387.