

Support the Providing Responsible Emergency Plans for Animals at Risk of Emerging Disasters (PREPARED) Act

to be reintroduced by Reps. Dina Titus (D-NV) and Rodney Davis (R-IL) in the 117th Congress



Photos by Meredith Lee, HSUS

Planning for Emergencies

Weather-related disasters are occurring more frequently and with increasing intensity across the United States. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, reports estimated that nearly 600,000 animals were left abandoned – most without shelter, food and water, or a concrete plan to rescue them. In response to that tragedy and all the lives lost, the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act was enacted in 2006. Though this was an important step in the right direction, the legislation only went as far as to require that state and local plans “take into account the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals prior to, during, and following a major disaster or emergency.” Unfortunately, the PETS Act does not include those same considerations for commercially owned animals.

What the PREPARED Act would do

The PREPARED Act would require those who are regulated under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) to have emergency response plans for natural and manmade disasters. AWA-regulated facilities – including commercial animal breeders and dealers, research facilities, and exhibitors such as zoos, aquariums and circuses – would need to “develop, document, and follow a contingency plan to provide for the humane handling, treatment, transportation, housing, and care of its animals in the event of an emergency or disaster.”

The bill requires that covered entities submit their plans to the USDA annually and ensure that all employees are trained on emergency procedures. The contingency plans must (1) identify emergency situations that the entity might experience (including natural disasters, animal escapes, power outages and mechanical breakdowns); (2) outline specific tasks to respond to those emergencies including evacuation or shelter-in-place, provision of backup food and water, sanitation, ventilation, bedding, and veterinary care; (3) establish a chain of command and identify personnel responsible for the response tasks; and (4) address materials, resources and training to handle response and recovery.

Important for people, too

This legislation is common-sense reform. In addition to the animal welfare concerns, lack of advance planning and abandonment of animals at AWA-regulated facilities can jeopardize safety and put additional burden on first responders, the local community, and nongovernmental entities that assist with rescue efforts. It can also exact a tremendous cost on the business and its mission, such as a research laboratory that loses thousands of animals carefully bred for study of a specific cancer.

USDA rule

The USDA set out to require such emergency contingency plans in 2008 under President George W. Bush, in a proposed rule that the agency finalized in 2012. That rule was stayed in 2013 in response to a Washington Post article about a magician who would be required to have a plan for his rabbit. But the 2014 Farm Bill then directed the USDA to establish a de minimis exemption in the AWA for people with only a few nondangerous animals, noting that doing so would free up agency resources to lift the stay on its contingency rule “without delay.” The USDA finalized its de minimis exemption rule in June 2018, so there is no reason for further delay on requiring emergency plans for AWA-regulated facilities.

In the 116th Congress, the identical legislation – H.R. 1042 – had the bipartisan support of 223 cosponsors.



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AWA-regulated facilities that have been impacted by disasters include these examples:

- *Miami, FL (Aug. 1992)*: Hundreds of monkeys in breeding colonies escaped from buildings damaged by Hurricane Andrew, with panicked people shooting at the animals. An impala, an ostrich, and a dik-dik were killed and two to three baboons escaped from Miami Metrozoo.
- *Houston, TX (June 2001)*: More than 34,400 animals died, including 78 monkeys, 35 dogs and 300 rabbits, when Tropical Storm Allison flooded the University of Texas Medical Center. The facility, along the edge of one of Houston's largest bayous, housed more than half of its research animals underground.
- *Gulfport, MS and New Orleans, LA (Aug. 2005)*: When Hurricane Katrina hit Gulfport's Marine Life Oceanarium, eight dolphins, 19 sea lions and a seal were left to weather the storm and a 40-foot storm surge on their own. Six sea lions died, and the seal was never located. Two otters and a raccoon died from the storm at Audubon Zoo in New Orleans.
- *WaKeeney, KS (June 2008)*: Despite four days of National Weather Service warnings that severe tornados were expected in the area, the Culpepper & Merriweather Circus had two elephants outside to give rides to the public. When a tornado hit, equipment fell on one of them, a handler was thrown from an elephant and injured, and the animals bolted, causing property damage in neighborhoods several blocks away while loose for three hours.
- *Duluth, MN (June 2012)*: A polar bear escaped from an exhibit during floods at Lake Superior Zoo.
- *Tuttle, OK (May 2015)*: Tigers, bears, and other exotic animals were reported loose by Tiger Safari after a tornado.
- *Naples, FL (Sept. 2017)*: Two greater kudu were killed at Naples Zoo during Hurricane Irma.
- *Panama City Beach and Chipley, FL (Oct. 2018)*: Two big cats were killed at Zoo World and a wolf fled from Seacrest Wolf Preserve during Hurricane Michael.

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