As a dealer, exhibitor, research facility, intermediate handler, animal transporter, or other entity regulated under the Animal Welfare Act, you are required to make a contingency plan. This plan describes what you will do to safeguard your animals during emergencies or disasters. Use this tech note to help guide the development of your contingency plan.

Contingency Plan Basics

- There is no one-size-fits-all contingency plan. You’ll need to create a plan that addresses your facility’s unique needs in different emergencies.
- Your contingency plan should cover all animals in your main facility and all holding facilities, including alternate locations you may use during an evacuation.
- Any licensee or registrant who transports animals or works as an intermediate handler must also develop a contingency plan for emergencies that can occur during the transport process or while temporarily holding animals.
- Your employees should be aware of your facility’s contingency plan and trained to carry out their designated roles and responsibilities.
- You must review your plan and document any updates at least annually. If you experience personnel changes or other changes, you should review your plan more often to keep it up to date.

What To Consider When Planning for Contingencies

Your contingency plan must address four things: when you will activate your plan, what actions you will take, who is responsible for taking those actions, and how you will accomplish them. Use the information below to guide your contingency planning.

When Will You Activate Your Plan?
Emergencies are not limited to natural disasters. They can also include local events such as a fire, power outage, illness or death of key personnel, or other unexpected situation that interrupts normal animal care activities.

What Actions Will You Take?
Your contingency plan must document the actions you’ll take in response to the emergency situations that could affect your operation. For example, in some situations, you may need to evacuate your animals and employees. In other circumstances, you may decide that sheltering in place is the safest option. Use the information on the next page to consider what you might do in each situation.
Who Will Be Responsible for Taking Specific Actions?
In an emergency, it’s critical that you and your staff know your roles and responsibilities. By assigning tasks to staff as part of the contingency planning process and establishing clear authority and lines of communication, you can streamline your response during an emergency.

- Determine who has the authority to make key decisions.
- Identify who is responsible for each task listed in your plan. Assign tasks to positions rather than people to ensure your plan remains accurate if staff change.
- Develop a contact list, distribute it to everyone involved in the plan, and keep it up to date.
- Decide which methods you’ll use to maintain communication in an emergency.
- Make sure everyone is properly trained in their responsibilities, knows where to find everything they will need, and understands how to use it.
- If staff change or roles within your staff change, make sure everyone is notified.

How Will You Carry Out Your Plan?
As you develop your contingency plan, consider:

- What equipment, materials, and means you'll need to carry out the actions in your plan
- How you’ll obtain equipment during an emergency if it’s not on hand
- Whether staff must be certified or receive specialized training to use the equipment

Also, if you plan to house animals at another facility, make sure the facility is willing and able to receive your animals.

Putting It All Together
The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has an optional form (APHIS Form 7093) that you can download and use when developing and documenting your contingency plan. APHIS’ Animal Care inspectors are also available to help you develop or review plans, as needed.

For More Information
You can find information about contingency planning in the following sections of the Animal Welfare Act (9 CFR Part 2): Subpart C, § 2.38(i)(4); Subpart H, § 2.102(a)(4) and (b)(3); and Subpart I, § 2.134. Go to ecf.gov and search “9 CFR 2.” For information on the contingency planning rule, visit www.aphis.usda.gov and search “contingency planning rule.”

To contact APHIS’ Animal Care program, call (970) 494-7478 or email animalcare@usda.gov.