

CARING FOR YOUR PET IN AN EARTHQUAKE ZONE

E.L.Flint (MSc, BVSc, MANCVS, PhD Veterinary Behaviourist)

Animals are deeply affected by earthquakes too. In fact in many ways they suffer more because they cannot understand the process. They are just terrified and their instinct is to hide or run. Many will suffer posttraumatic stress syndrome.

Here are some tips that may help

CATS

PREPARATION

Ensure cats are micro chipped and wear some form of identification if possible. Tracker tags on collars are sensible

If you have any warning, make sure your cats are confined somewhere safe and that you have cat carriers available to transport them should evacuation be necessary. It could be useful to have them in their cages when a quake starts so that they can be kept safe under a solid table or similar during a quake and then easily transported during evacuation.

Have Feliway spray (feline facial pheromone) on hand to use in the carriers. This spray helps to keep cats calm and settled. Using pheromone diffusers routinely in earthquake zones may be prudent.

If you haven't already done so, make sure your cats are happy with their cat carriers. It's useful to do this anyway to make trips to the vet or cattery less stressful.

It may be useful in quake zones to teach your cat to sleep routinely in its carrier positioned under a solid table or similar. Use a carrier that has food and water containers attached and keep these replenished. The cat doesn't have to be shut in the carrier, effectively we want it to use the carrier as a cubby to which it will run when frightened so maximising chances of survival and allowing it to be easily found should evacuation be necessary.

DURING

During a quake once the cat is in the cat carrier cover the cat carrier with a towel previously sprayed with Feliway (five minutes prior to covering the cage).

AFTER

In your new accommodation keep the cat in one room with feliway spray or diffuser used. Provide as many familiar objects as possible to help the cat settle. Spend time sitting with the cat, playing with it and grooming it.

Monitor your cat for signs of stress.

Cats that are acutely stressed may lip lick, vocalise, urinate and defaecate in fright and hide.

Cats that are chronically stressed (likely during aftershocks) may show decreased appetite, over-grooming, hair pulling and inappropriate urination. Some may suffer stress related cystitis (bladder inflammation)

Your veterinarian can help you with medication to alleviate both acute and chronic stress.

DOGS

PREPARATION:

Make sure your dog always wears some form of identification.

Tracker tags that can be attached to collars and can be located by cell phones are an excellent idea in quake zones.

Have your dog sleep in a secure area routinely.

Teach your dog to lie down next to you on command and to stay close.

Teach your dog to crawl on command and to follow you underneath low tables or similar or to go under a solid object on command

Provide a solid kennel with which the dog is familiar and in which it feels secure.

Keep a bottle of Adaptil spray (Dog appeasing pheromone) or an Adaptil collar as part of your pet care kit.

Make sure your dog is happy to jump into your car on command.

DURING

Keep your dog on lead at all times during a quake to make sure it doesn't run off in a panic.

Have an Adaptil collar on your dog as soon as there is a quake warning and throughout any aftershocks. An alternative would be using spray on a bandana.

Try not to panic, stay relaxed as this will help to instil confidence in your pet.

Reward relaxed behaviour. Do not fuss over a pet that is shaking and crying, just quietly hold it or place a hand on it.

AFTER

Dogs may suffer from post-traumatic stress so if your dog is shaking, panting, lip licking and yawning has diarrhoea, is constantly attempting to hide or run in response to minor noises or aftershocks or cannot seem to settle and sleep, seek help from your veterinarian as these animals will benefit from anti-anxiety medication.

Other stress related behaviours may include constantly licking objects and licking body parts particularly paws.

Some animals may show fear based aggressive behaviour as a result of stress and medication will help control that too.

Dogs studied after earthquakes in Japan, typically showed signs of severe stress for at least 10 days after the earthquakes had subsided.

Some dogs may show severe separation anxiety after earthquakes finding it terrifying to be left alone. These animals also need medication and behavioural therapy.