emergency evacuation guidelines

disaster tool-kit for wildlife groups and carers in australia
The 2019-2020 Black Summer bushfires impacted native wildlife populations and their habitats at an unprecedented scale throughout Australia. Wildlife groups and carers worked tirelessly to help animals in need. In some cases, their facilities and homes were threatened by the bushfires, adding even more stress as carers feared evacuating.

Even in the most catastrophic disasters, being prepared and having a support network can save lives. During and after the Black Summer bushfires, IFAW worked to identify resources to support wildlife groups and carers, ultimately realising the largest gap was for disaster preparedness. A plan was put in motion to create a series of disaster planning and response tools informed by local stakeholders and lessons learned, and with the flexibility to be scalable to meet the needs for specific sites and species.

The first resource created is the Emergency Evacuation Planning kit, a step-by-step workshop with guidelines and templates to assist wildlife care groups and individuals in preparing an effective evacuation plan. This resource outlines key operations and backup processes to activate before, during, and after natural disasters or other emergencies to support a successful evacuation.

An Emergency Evacuation Plan is only one component of a comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, and so it should be noted that additional considerations must be made to ensure wildlife groups and carers are fully prepared when the next disaster strikes.

Disclaimer: These materials are intended to assist wildlife rehabilitation groups and individual wildlife carers. While we attempt to address specific topics, it is not possible to include everything necessary. Thus, this information must be understood as a tool rather than a complete presentation of all problems and issues regarding disaster management. It is also generic and may not be accurate for all circumstances. IFAW expressly disclaims responsibility, and shall have no liability for any damages, loss or injury whatsoever suffered as a result of your reliance on the information contained in these materials.
why have an emergency management plan?

Wildlife carers and facilities have a responsibility to protect their animals, staff, volunteers and the public should a natural disaster or other emergency occur.

An Emergency Management Plan will support your organisation to:

- Prepare for events that occur outside the range of normal operations that may adversely affect your organisation’s ability to operate.
- Develop contingency plans for identified hazards that may affect your operations, such as fires, floods, disease outbreaks, and other situations, detailing how you will respond to each scenario.
- Create a beneficial working relationship with local Emergency Management authorities. By sharing your plan, they may provide valuable feedback and play a role in effective response planning.

As a wildlife carer, you may think this is too much work to do as an individual. Consider participating in your group’s emergency planning activities and identifying actions you can scale down to ensure your animals are protected in an emergency, and what role you may be able to fill to support your group.
why plan for an emergency evacuation?

An evacuation plan is a set of arrangements and procedures for moving animals from a dangerous and threatening zone to a safe and secure temporary facility. When disasters strike, having a plan and being prepared is vital to reduce the risk to people and the animals in your care.

When there is an evacuation plan in place, people know what to do, what resources they need, and where to go. This reduces worry and panic. It also builds the organisation’s reputation as one that responsibly puts the safety and well-being of staff, volunteers, and animals as the top priority.

Having an evacuation plan in place that allows people to act safely during an emergency reduces the chance of becoming a victim themselves.

If you become a victim, you will no longer be able to help animals. If you can successfully evacuate your animals, you will be able to continue your mission to rescue and rehabilitate animals in need.
how to develop an evacuation plan?

When possible, set aside time with your team to list common threats to your facility and the scenarios that might require an evacuation.

Australia often faces floods, fires and cyclones, but it is important to consider threats specific to your community and the likelihood of each happening.

Other factors for triggering an evacuation are site specific, so think about the characteristics of your buildings, enclosures and road access and how these may also play a role in decision-making for your facility.

Once you have identified the scenarios that might require an evacuation you are ready to begin developing the plan.

This guideline will walk you through five planning steps. These steps will allow you to customise your evacuation plan to meet the needs of your facility and animals in your care.

The five planning steps will explore the following areas:

- Emergency support network
- Animal management
- Resources
- General evacuation planning
- Action plan

templates

This guideline was designed as a companion to the Emergency Evacuation Plan Templates that you will use during the development of your evacuation plan. The five-step planning will guide you to fill the templates and create a draft plan. The templates were designed purposely in a format to allow for modifications to suit your specific circumstances and needs. The tool-kit includes additional resources to support your evacuation plan.

Simpler templates are available for individual carers. These templates will be more suitable for individuals with a smaller number of animals in care.
evacuation plan steps
step 1
emergency support network

emergency response team

When designing an evacuation plan for a wildlife group or facility with a large number of animals in care, the first step is to form an Emergency Response Team (ERT) with members of your institution. The ERT will oversee the planning and implementation of emergency procedures such as the emergency evacuation plan.

The ERT also identifies key roles and responsibilities. Below are some to consider assigning.

incident lead:

- Primary point of contact during the emergency
- Responsible for assessing the situation and level of emergency
- Liaising with local emergency authorities
- Activating action plan and overseeing emergency protocols

logistics lead:

- Ensures the appropriate emergency services, support agencies and staff members have been notified of the situation and informed of the action plan.

communications lead:

- Primary person in charge of internal and external communications
- Ensures the appropriate emergency services, support agencies and staff members have been notified of the situation and informed of the action plan.

logistics lead:

- Primary person who coordinates supplies and equipment needed to implement the evacuation plan.

emergency contacts

Establishing a support network and strong relationships with key emergency contacts is essential to an evacuation plan for both wildlife groups and individual carers.

These emergency contacts could be helpful with advice on emergency planning and could assist during an emergency. This first step is to organise points of contact during an emergency.

By identifying which stakeholders could be able to assist during an emergency and an evacuation, you will also develop relationships with groups which can offer advice and help to identify who should be notified of the situation.
made aware when activating the evacuation plan.

Local and state stakeholders that could be part of your support network include:

- Fire, police, State Emergency Service (SES), coast guard, and emergency medical services
- Animal control agencies
- Wildlife officials
- Local or regional animal welfare organisations
- Veterinary practices, associations, colleges
- Other wildlife care and rehabilitation centers, sanctuaries, parks, or zoos.

When planning an evacuation as an individual carer with a small number of animals in care, a list of emergency contacts should also be included in the evacuation plan. Include local emergency services, friends, colleagues, relatives and neighbours that could act as a support network and help you during an emergency.

**temporary placement facilities and carers**

Include in your plan temporary placement facilities and carers that could potentially receive and care for your animals. These are people and places with the capacity and skills to take care of animals during an emergency event.

This list of temporary placement facilities and carers should include multiple options across different locations as your closest options might also be impacted by the same disaster.

We also recommend having written agreements with these temporary placement facilities with clear set protocols in place and accountabilities and liabilities highlighted.

*Action: Refer to step 1 section in the templates, where you will find tables to add this information in your plan.*
step 2
animal management

Listed below are key suggested actions that could help a carer or a wildlife group manage and coordinate a safe, organised, and efficient animal evacuation and ensure continuity of care for the animals.

▶ Strategically categorise the animals. These categories can be based on different factors such as health status, welfare grounds or the conservation status of the species.

eexample of animal categorisation:

category 1 - animals that are less likely to stress as a direct consequence of relocation and are easy to pack and transport.

category 2 - animals that are less likely to stress as a direct consequence of relocation but are not as easy to pack and transport (therefore requiring a bigger effort).

category 3 - animals that are likely to stress by relocation, therefore, will be evacuated if it is necessary and the danger is imminent.

▶ Include a list of animals in the emergency evacuation plan along with their basic health and care information. This list should be updated and cross-referenced with the main database (if applicable) regularly, especially at the start of the bushfire or flood season when the chances of an emergency event are higher.

▶ Prepare and attach an identification card for each carrier, and if possible, make it waterproof. The use of labels, identification tags, photographs, or microchip numbers is important to avoid animals getting lost during an evacuation.

▶ Prepare evacuation bags and include a care card to provide the temporary carer with clear
instructions on how to look after the animals, especially in cases where the animal requires special care or treatment.

Train staff and team members on the use of equipment and procedures to prepare, pack and transport animals. This will increase the likelihood of a safe, efficient, and effective evacuation. Conduct exercises and drills to practise emergency procedures to help the team be better prepared and provide an estimate of the number of people needed and the time required to prepare, pack and evacuate the animals. This is important when coordinating the evacuation logistics.

Action: Refer to step 2 section in the templates, where you will find tables to add this information to your plan.

You'll find identification and care card templates in the appendix.
step 3
resources

The resources needed to evacuate will depend on the average number of animals in care, species, and their specific needs.

Don’t assume resources that are usually available, such as the internet, will be available during or after the emergency. Be prepared and have alternative arrangements in place.

Resources can be divided into 3 categories:

► roles and responsibilities:

For individual carers with a small number of animals in care (<10), think about the activities you may need help with such as a driver for transportation. For groups or facilities with a large number of animals (>10), think about who could take on the role of driver, handler, veterinary professional and admin support.

► supplies and equipment:

This will be based on the average number of animals in care and resources that are already available. See the tables provided in the template to list the equipment, supplies, and resources already available as well as what will be needed to safely evacuate the animals in care. Include on this list: carriers, cages, and bags, as well as medical supplies, such as medication for sedation, and animal handling equipment.

► transportation:

Consider vehicles that are already available and people who can help with driving or have additional vehicles to help if needed. If you don’t have a vehicle available to transport the animals, consider making alternative arrangements with backup carers, neighbours, and local shelters. A transport manifest can be helpful to keep your evacuation organised.

Action: Refer to step 3 section in the templates, where you will find tables to add this information to your plan.

You’ll find a transport manifest template in the appendix.
step 4
general evacuation planning

It is strongly recommended to prepare a few other resources to help stay organised during an evacuation, and to make sure you don’t forget any important items or actions before leaving the site.

Consider printing the maps and checklists described below and adding them to your plan, as often during emergencies, amenities are not available or are unreliable, i.e. electricity and internet connectivity. Having a hard copy could be essential in getting you, your team and your animals to evacuate safely.

**personnel contact list**

Add to the plan a list of staff and volunteers with their emergency contact details. Make sure you update it regularly.

Consider noting important personnel information that would need to be considered during an evacuation i.e. in a fire, smoke and stress may exacerbate conditions and trigger health issues for someone who suffers from asthma. This personnel information should be stored responsibly to protect privacy.

**evacuation map**

Example items that should be highlighted on the map:

- evacuation routes, multiple options
- temporary placement facilities routes
- commonly affected roads that are affected by hazards like floods
- emergency services
- hospitals
- community emergency shelters.

**site layout**

Example items to consider including in your site layout. Some of these elements don’t apply to small facilities:

- buildings and animal enclosures
- site boundaries
- emergency exits
- evacuation paths to assembly areas
- assembly areas
- first-aid kit
- on-site refuge (in case of imminent threat)
- on-site water points, tanks, or nearby water supplies
- electrical points
gas supply and valve points
> dangerous goods and other hazardous materials.

The assembly area within the property will be where your team meets and is given further instructions by the Incident Lead. The emergency assembly area should be identified with a sign and be accessible on foot. Multiple copies of the site layout should be placed in visible locations throughout the building.

For carers, a simple map of the property will suffice. Consider highlighting where animals are housed and where you store evacuation supplies like carriers. It’s strongly recommended you consult with local emergency authorities to determine the best evacuation routes and assembly areas.

**last walk-through and re-entry checklists**

Before you evacuate, it’s recommended you do one last walk-through.

The last walk-through is likely assigned to one person to go around the property, once all the animals are evacuated to close buildings, shut off power, and do one last check that no one was left behind.

A re-entry is performed once you have the all-clear from authorities that it is safe to return. You will want to do a walk-through before any animals are brought back to make sure their enclosures are secure and ready for use.

**other important items list**

Your plan is an opportunity to think about other important items you would want to take with you during an evacuation. This could be your organisation’s registration paperwork, legal documentation, donor lists, computers or hard drives, or even special items like a photo album.

**Action:** Refer to step 4 section in the templates, where you will find tables to add this information to your plan.

You’ll find some suggested actions pre-populated in the templates.
step 5
action plan

An action plan constitutes a set of action statements – these are clear and specific procedures outlining actions to be taken at various stages of the emergency. These will guide you and your team on what activates the evacuation plan.

The Australian Emergency Alert system is a national telephone warning system that aims to save lives by letting people know about threats such as bushfires as early as possible. When danger is imminent, emergency authorities such as fire and emergency services, can send a warning message to residents in high-risk areas.

**emergency alerts are sent in the form of:**

- recorded voice messages to landline numbers based on handset location
- text messages to mobile phones within a defined area based on the billing address.

Details can be found at [www.emergencyalert.gov.au](http://www.emergencyalert.gov.au)

In addition to the audio emergency alerts, the Australian hazard icons are a visual alert to aid in emergency events and can support decision-making in your evacuation plan activation. As the alerts change colours, indicating an increase in warning level, you will want to progress your actions to prepare for a possible evacuation.

**action statements**

The final step outlines actions to take in the event of an emergency such as an extreme weather event that could lead to an evacuation. We recommend organising your action plan in an easy-to-read table that aligns actions with the alert phases.

The table included in the template is an example of an action plan, which includes triggers based on the Australian Emergency Alert system that activates each phase of your plan and suggests key actions during a weather event.

Action: Refer to step 5 section in the templates, where you will find tables to add this information to your plan.
national hazard icons

fire

storm

flood

cyclone

heat

other

next steps

Once you have completed a first draft of your Emergency Evacuation Plan, you will want to run through a few additional activities to make sure it is ready-to-go.

- Walk-through your plan to identify gaps. If you are a larger organisation, meet with your wider team to go through each step to ensure the plan encompasses your facility’s needs during an evacuation.

- Train team members and test your plan with an evacuation simulation exercise. It is important for everyone to know what their role is during an emergency and have an opportunity to practise. Stuffed animals can be used for the simulation as you run through the evacuation plan steps. For individual carers, you will want to share your plan with your support network and engage them on how to carry out their roles. A simulation will also provide the opportunity to make necessary changes to your plan as you review what went well and areas for improvement.

- Request a meeting with authorities to ensure lines of communication and to gain intelligence on the most up-to-date disaster-related info. Ask if they could review your evacuation plan.

- Once it’s finalised, print out your plan and have it in a readily accessible location. Be sure key personnel are familiar with the plan and share a copy with relevant local authorities.

Congratulations!

You have completed your Emergency Evacuation Plan. We hope that you feel more prepared for the next disaster and have the tools to implement your plan should it be needed.

Thank you for taking the time to prioritise the safety of you and your animals. The work you do is invaluable for the conservation and protection of our wildlife.
The problems we face are urgent, complicated, and resistant to change. Real solutions demand creativity, hard work, and involvement of people like you.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) is global non-profit helping animals and people thrive together. For the last 30 years, IFAW has worked with local partners on the ground in Australia to rescue, rehabilitate and release wildlife into a secure environment and to protect and restore their natural habitat.


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