Priorities

Disasters, by nature, are catastrophic events that overwhelm the ability of individuals, communities and regions. During such catastrophic events, many things get damaged including transportation, communications, emotions and thinking.

When dealing with livestock during emergencies, it is critical to re-establish your priorities. The first priority should be your personal safety and welfare, followed by the safety and welfare of other people, and finally animals and property. If you are safe, you can do more to benefit animals. If you are at risk, so is their welfare and health. Follow official instructions for access and safety when reentering a disaster zone.

Seek and Own

The first logical step in caring for livestock and other animals is to locate, control and provide for those animals. Locating animals often is limited by transportation blockages from the disaster because normal routes may not be available. Your local emergency manager, usually found at an established incident command post, may have alternatives. If the emergency manager is difficult to find, contact local law enforcement for information. As you reenter a disaster area, remember hazards may still occur, including:

- downed power lines.
- flooded areas.
- unstable roads and highways.
- gas and utility leaks.
- debris and wreckage.
- vandals and looters.

Leave an itinerary of your search plan with local authorities and family members. Travel slowly, be alert for hazards, and do not enter unsecured areas. Take identification and livestock ownership documents with you as you search. Official emergency responders often evacuate animals, so check with authorities to see if your livestock has been

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moved to a holding facility before you enter the disaster zone.

**Sensitivity**

Animals are like people in that they are emotionally affected by disasters. Often violent impacts of disaster disorient and temporarily alter the behavioral state of livestock. When, and if, you locate your animals, realize that they may be upset, confused and agitated. They need help finding their normal behavioral pattern. Here are some proven techniques for doing this:

1. Handle livestock quietly, calmly and in a manner they are familiar.
2. Wear clothing and use vehicles that are familiar to them.
3. If possible, keep or reunite familiar animal groups with each other.
4. As soon as possible, place them in familiar settings or one which is quiet, calm and insulated from additional stimuli.
5. Soft music and familiar sounds may help calm livestock.
6. If possible, clean the animals (i.e., wipe out their eyes, mouths, and nostrils).
7. If possible, move animals away from the residue of the disaster.
8. Treat wounds of injured animals so their comfort level improves.

**Feed, Safety and Shelter**

Animals and livestock often relate security to the familiarity of their surroundings. In some cases, you may be able to return them to familiar surroundings and enhance their recovery. Unfortunately, a disaster often impacts the familiar surroundings altering the landscape’s character, feel, smell, look and layout. To enhance the animal’s comfort level, find another place with similar characteristics. Move the livestock there until you can remedy the damage.

Feed and water are a big part in livestock disaster recovery. In addition to the health and nutrient aspects of appropriate feed and water, livestock can become very picky to eat and drink if their feed and water do not smell and taste familiar. This nervousness is usually greater during and after disasters.

People who show livestock often use Kool-aid® water pails before they haul so that when the animal smells the water at a new location, the Kool-aid® smell is familiar and comfortable. Although not practical before a disaster, many animals will see several holding areas after disasters before finally going home. The Kool-aid® approach to sensory familiarity can reduce stress along the way. Always remember that a calm and quiet shelter serves both physical and emotional needs for livestock.

**References**

Disaster Preparedness Guidelines for Horse Owners. Indiana State Board of Animal Health.
Guidelines for the Development of a Local Animal Care Plan in Emergencies, Disasters, and Evacuations. Heath, Sebastian E. Ph.D. D.V.M. Purdue University, School of Veterinary Medicine.