

GETTING OUT WITH YOUR ANIMALS

Before, during, and after a fast-moving wildfire — what animal owners need to do, in order.



Written for the Spokane Complex fires, August 2026. Swipe for the full sequence.

BEFORE THE ORDER COMES

Waiting for a Level 3 order costs the one thing that protects animals: time. Do this on any Level 1 or 2 day.

1 Microchip and confirm ID

Every animal microchipped, registration current, tags on collars and halters.

2 Photograph you together

One clear photo of you with each animal, saved on your phone.

3 Pack a go-bag per animal

Food, water, meds with dosing, bowls, leash, litter, records, one familiar toy.

4 Stage a labeled carrier

One hard-sided carrier per animal, labeled with your phone number.

5 Name a backup neighbor

Someone who can act for you and knows exactly where the carriers are.

ON A RED FLAG DAY

Bring outdoor cats in and coop free-range birds now. Once panicked, neither can be caught.

STOP. BREATHE. THEN LOAD.

Animals are most often forgotten while sitting in a carrier by the door. Count them out loud before you drive.

1 Confine first

One closed room with no hiding spots while you pack. Cover carriers with a towel.

2 Cats and dogs

A cat that won't enter a carrier can go in a pillowcase. Dogs stay leashed the whole time.

3 Birds and small mammals

Cover cages with breathable cloth. Rabbits can die of panic and heat alone — move them early.

4 Horses and livestock

Move out before smoke thickens. A horse in full panic can't be handled. Releasing them is not a plan.

5 On the road

Low beams on, windows closed, air on recirculate. Follow officers over your GPS. Don't stop to film.

IF VISIBILITY FAILS

Move only to bare, paved ground away from vegetation, tanks, and power lines.

IF YOU ARE SEPARATED FROM AN ANIMAL

In the 2018 Camp Fire, nearly 4,000 animals were separated from their people. Coordinated sheltering returned 3,675 home. Losing an animal is not proof you failed.

1 Do not chase

Never into smoke, traffic, or a closed zone. Don't go back through a barricade.

2 Note and pin the location

Last place seen, time, direction of travel. Drop a map pin.

3 Report once you're safe

Photo and microchip number. Tell the chip company they're missing.

4 Check shelters daily

Animals move between sites during a large incident.

SPOKANE RESOURCES

SCRAPS urgent animal medical — (509) 477-2533

Spokane HEART sheltering — heartofspokane.org

SpokAnimal Guardian Angel — (509) 534-8133

Found animals, no owner known — Spokane County Fairgrounds

SMOKE SHOWS UP LATE

Watch for 24 to 72 hours. An animal that seems fine the night you evacuate is not necessarily clear.

1 Bathe them once you're safe

Dogs and cats groom, and ash on fur and paws gets swallowed.

2 Rinse irritated eyes

A lubricating drop helps. Keep clean water in front of them at all times.

3 Cool them gradually

Shade or A/C, damp towels on paws, belly, and groin. Never wrap the whole body.

4 Call a vet for warning signs

Persistent coughing, labored breathing, pale or blue gums, or hours of lethargy. Flat-faced dogs, cats, seniors, and animals with heart or lung conditions are highest risk.

SOURCES AND CREDIT

Adapted from *Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Planning* (July 2026) by Mel Sobolewski and Dr. Rebecca (Gimenez) Husted, TLAER, Inc., and the *Pet Emergency & Disaster Preparedness Workbook* from the HALTER Project.

General preparedness guidance, not veterinary or emergency instruction. Always follow your local officials.

You cannot replace them. Prepare now, before the order comes.

EVACUATING WITH ANIMALS

What every animal owner needs to know before, during, and after a fast-moving wildfire.

BEFORE

Microchip and ID every animal; keep registration current.

Pack a go-bag per animal: food, water, meds, leash, records, one toy.

Stage a labeled carrier and name a backup neighbor who can act for you.

DURING

Confine animals to one closed room while you pack; cover carriers with a towel.

Count them out loud before you drive — animals are most often left waiting by the door.

On the road: low beams, windows closed, recirculate air, follow officers over GPS.

AFTER

Bathe them once you're safe; rinse irritated eyes; keep clean water available.

Watch 24–72 hours. An animal that seems fine the night of evacuation is not necessarily clear.

Call a vet for coughing, labored breathing, pale or blue gums, or lasting lethargy.

Information credit: **Melissa Sobolewski** and Dr. Rebecca (Gimenez) Husted, TLAER, Inc., *Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Planning*, July 2026.

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