

Suggestions for preparing for the unthinkable.

It's never too early to start preparing for the ongoing care of your companion animals just in case they found themselves without you to care for them. Take the time now to establish a record of your pets. Include such things as their health status, medications they may be taking and any special dietary needs. List the contact information of the veterinarian who has been caring for them and sign whatever may be necessary for your pet's records to be shared with a caretaker or a new owner or released to a new clinic. And keep this information updated.

Write a personality profile on each of your animals so the person taking over will be able to proceed with some understanding of your pet's temperament. List favorite foods, favorite toys, anything that would help your pet be comfortable in strange surroundings as he makes the transition to a new home.

If possible, find a family member, friend or neighbor who can act on behalf of your animals should you not be able to do so in an emergency. And be sure to include them and your veterinarian on your list of emergency phone numbers.

You should also consider writing a will or living trust that gives instructions for your pet's immediate care and future should you become unable to express your wishes or should they outlive you.

If possible set up a trust fund to allow for the expense of their care and designate a trustee for that fund.

Make sure you note everything you've decided upon in your will or living trust document. And be sure you leave a copy with your family so they are aware you have specific instructions regarding your companion animals and inform your veterinarian of your wishes as well.

You can check with your local humane society and your veterinarian to see if they have any forms that could be of use to you as you set up legal documentation for the ongoing care of your pets. Some clinics and humane societies have a "Legacy of Caring" packet available for you to use.

Be specific about your wishes and list the pets you are including in the document by name with any instructions you want followed for their care. If you have a guardian ready to step in and take over for you, be sure to include that person's name and contact information as well.

. Taking the same steps for your companion animals that you would take to insure the care of your family members and the distribution of your material goods will ensure their future as well should you not be there to provide for them. And creating something in writing now will relieve family members of the burden of wondering what you would want them to do.