

Natural Disaster Preparedness for Poultry Producers

Are you prepared?

How well are you prepared for a natural disaster? There is no possible way to be prepared for every possible disaster. However, many things can be prepared in advance to help cope with a natural disaster. Proper planning before a disaster occurs can decrease the severity of the impact and can help a poultry producer return to normal operating conditions quickly and safely.

What types of natural disasters are likely to occur?

Hurricane season (June 1-November 30) can bring high winds, torrential rains, flooding, and tidal surges in coastal areas. Cold winter weather forecasts can lead to ice storms or heavy snow which can not only block roads, but may lead to overloading of roof structures and eventual building collapse. During the severe winter of 2009-2010, approximately 80 poultry houses collapsed in Maryland and Delaware due to snow overloading. Regardless of the type of disaster, similar effects occur to transportation and public utility services.



What can I do to prepare?

Gathering information is a good place to start preparing. Prepare a list of all important contacts with emergency contact numbers, such as: local police and fire department, local emergency management office, hospital, physician, school, integrator and flock supervisor, feed supplier, fuel supplier, propane supplier, equipment maintenance company, insurance company, extension office, electric company, phone numbers for family and neighbors, etc.

Gather important materials, such as: standard operating procedures, material safety data sheets for chemicals in use, maintenance manuals for equipment, financial information, insurance policy, etc. Prepare a checklist, they are helpful for remembering information during a stressful situation.



Top priority tasks

Chickens can't wait for water, feed, heat, and ventilation, these basic needs will need to be met. Normal feeding may be interrupted during an emergency. Depending on feed availability and open roads, companies will prioritize which farms get feed first. The correct feed may not always be available, but take what you can get. It may be necessary to ration feed, feeding only enough for maintenance and reducing hours of light. Are you prepared for your generator to run continually for 2-3 weeks? Your generator should be designed to match demand and capable for extended operation. Make sure your generator is properly maintained and load tested weekly. Keep your generator fuel tanks full. Keep spare parts on hand, including several extra fuel filters.

Transportation and Energy Supply

Natural disasters often affect transportation and energy supplies. Floods, snow and ice may make road travel dangerous or impossible. Transportation delays may last for several days and may disrupt fuel deliveries, feed supplies, propane delivery and the movement of chicks or birds ready for slaughter. Electrical and phone lines may be down for some time until crews can reach damaged areas.

Some things to consider

Phone and internet service, both land line and cellular, may be out for some time. Initially word-of-mouth may be the only source of communication. Local Emergency Management is a good source of communication in emergencies. Communication should improve rapidly as conditions permit. Stay tuned to weather forecasts and emergency broadcasts. Consider purchasing a weather radio tuned to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) broadcasts. www.noaa.gov/ Have some cash on hand for emergency purchases. If power and phone lines are down, stores may not be able to make credit card transactions, and automatic teller machines may be out of service.

Safety is your top priority!

Do not enter collapsed or damaged buildings until their structural integrity can be verified. Consult your integrator or Department of Agriculture representative if your chickens are trapped inside collapsed poultry houses and may have to be euthanized.

Biosecurity is still important, but not at the expense of safety. In severe weather, appropriate clothing and footwear take precedent. In all emergencies, personal safety and the safety of your family are top priority. Do you have an emergency supply of food and water? Are your prescription medications filled? It is also important to keep extra batteries on hand to operate flashlights and radios.

For more information:

Ready Ag: is an educational tool developed to assist farmers and ranchers become better prepared for any disaster. This site has checklists available for specific operations. <http://readyag.psu.edu/>

EDEN (Extension Disaster Emergency Network): Is a collaborative multi-state effort by Extension Services across the country to improve the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters.

<http://eden.lsu.edu/Pages/default.aspx>

eXtension: Is an interactive learning environment delivering researched knowledge from land-grant universities across America. A disaster preparedness webpage is available at:

<http://www.extension.org/disasters>

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