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Planning for your pet's care after you're gone

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Coalition for Pet Protection (CPP) volunteers handle hundreds of calls per month on the hotline. These calls are usually for food or medical help, and can easily be taken care of.

The most difficult calls come on a too-regular basis. These are the ones where a loved one has died suddenly, there are animals left behind, and nothing is in place for the pet's care. This is a tragedy, and the end result is usually not good for the animal.

No one wants to think of their demise, but it is a given. Taking some simple steps today will give one peace of mind, take the burden off loved ones, and provide the care you would want for your beloved pet.

The following are guidelines. Plan to meet with a licensed professional to make arrangements.

Draw up a plan

Most state laws consider pets property. Because of that, one cannot leave money to an animal in a will. One needs to draw up a plan for the care of any pets left behind.

The best avenue is to set up a trust. To ensure that the funds go to the animal's care, this can be set up so that money is doled out on as-needed basis. The money is handled by a trustee.

There was a recent local case where the deceased had set up funds for her two dogs. Upon her death, promises were broken by family members, the dogs were sent to a shelter, and the money spent elsewhere. This extra step of having a trustee can make a big difference.

Estimate the cost of your animal's care. Visit with your veterinarian to get a clear picture of the money involved. The basic budget will allow for the minimum for food, treats, shelter, vet care, medications, and final care such as cremation. This budget should cover the anticipated life span of your pet. Keep in mind, that a cat in good health can live to be in their 20s, a dog in their late teens. A pet with health issues may not live as long, but the cost will be higher because of increased medical care cost.

Any funds left over in a trust can be designated for donation to the charity (or person) of your choice.

Power of attorney

Another legal document to consider is power of attorney. Some may think this is overkill, but consider the scenario of being incapacitated. Having a trusted person as a POA can be vital when bills need to be paid, and care given to your pets. A limited POA can be drawn up; this would limit the person to helping with your animal's needs.

Have all instructions written in a legal document. Do not trust verbal agreements. After all the legal documents are finished, inventory your pet's needs.

Have a list of your animal's medical requirements, such as medications. List the vet's office, along with health history. In addition to these, list feeding and grooming instructions, personality traits, likes/dislikes, favorite toys, blankets etc. The better picture you can give of your animal's lifestyle, the happier it will be in a new home. Some animals even have their own blogs, Facebook pages, twitter accounts, and Instagram accounts. If this is the case, provide information on these. Have this information in an easily-accessed place, and give copies to those who will care for your pets.

If your pet requires daily treatments such as insulin injections, be sure that at least 3 people close to you are aware of this and have access to your house. Preferably, take them through the process at least once. These three trusted people should also have a key, or other means of access to your house. Easy, quick access is critical in emergency situations.

It's best to review your documents on a regular basis. Make certain that all appointed caregivers are still available, and ready to assist.

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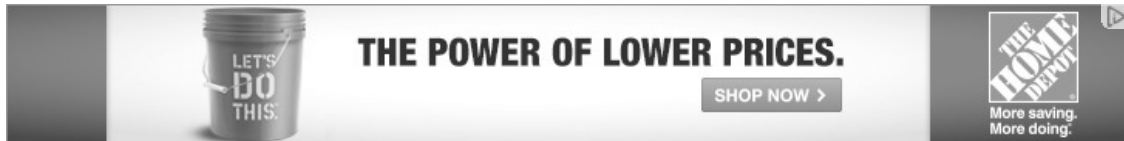
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