

Rabbit Care in a Disaster Shelter (i.e., Temporary Shelter)

Setup of Room

Rabbits should be in a quiet room, not shared with dogs, parrots or other noisy animals. A separate room or the cat room is best. The room should be near a sink for filling water bottles, cleaning cages & personal cleanup. It should have a cabinet for supplies and low enough to put items on top that are frequently used. There should be a place for personal gear where it is safe & not in the way. Rabbits are sensitive to heat. If it is hot, put them in an air-conditioned room, although not with cold air blowing directly on them. If they are not in a building, they should be in an area that is fenced (in case a rabbit gets out).

Arrange cages for easy access of doors (opening in convenient direction) and space for water bottle on the side of the cage. Make sure there is space between cages so rabbits cannot touch noses or separate cages with cardboard (to prevent fighting). Cages must be large enough so the rabbits can stretch out. Before the rabbits arrive, prepare each cage with empty litter box, empty food bowl, empty water bottle/bowl, a few toys and clipboard attached to cage. Turn these items upside down to make to clear it is a clean cage, ready for a rabbit. For each new rabbit, fill litter box with litter, fill food bowl, fill water bottle/bowl, attach paperwork to clipboard.

Setup an exercise area for the rabbits. This can be a small room for each rabbit. Or it can be several exercise pens setup in a large area. Be sure the rabbits cannot touch noses through the exercise pens so they can't fight.

Equipment

The quantities listed are for each room of rabbits. Two scoops (food), two trash cans (office sized) with bags, 50 gallon (200 liter) trash can with bags, two 5 gallon (20 liter) buckets (old drinking water, dirty bowls), 4 extra litter boxes (supply storage, dispensing litter, etc.), broom, whiskbroom, dustpan, 4 rolls paper towels, spray bottle with water, spray bottle with water & vinegar (1:1 ratio, labeled), two watering cans with long spouts (fill water bowls), disposable gloves, cleaning supply cart, several fans.

Pens, Sharpies, extra wide Sharpie, yellow highlighters, whiteboard, whiteboard markers, whiteboard eraser, notepad (or paper), duct tape, Animal Care Sheets, clipboards, carabiners for clipboards, 2 folding chairs, family radio (same channel as Shelter Manager), signs for cages (caution, medical), these care instructions.

Straight-sided litter boxes, water bottles with hangers (or non-tip water bowls), non-tip food bowls. For food & water, heavy ceramic crocks (4"-5" (10-13 cm) diameter) are best.

Human drinking water bottles (1 pint (0.5 liter)). Fill 3/4 full with water. Put in the freezer overnight (to cool rabbits).

Cages must have a solid floor. No wire mesh on the floor.

For toys, use cat toys that have only hard plastic, like balls with bells inside (no feathers, fabric or soft plastic that can be chewed). Can also use toilet paper & paper towel rolls & wooden chew toys.

Consumables

Timothy hay based food pellets & timothy hay (or orchard grass). If that is not available, alfalfa is okay short term.

For rabbits under 8 months old, nursing females and pregnant females, alfalfa based food pellets and alfalfa hay. If that is not available, timothy or orchard grass is okay short term.

For food pellets, look at the first ingredient. It should be hay (see above). If the first ingredient is wheat, it is not good for the rabbits. If it's all you have, it can be used short term. If you can see bits of dried fruit and nuts, do not use that. That is candy to the rabbits.

Paper or wood-based litter (not clay-based).

Use 1 quart (1 liter) (about 3"x8" (8x20 cm)) water bottles. They should have one or two metal balls in the tube. Do not use ones that have a ball and spring nor ones that have a lever. Wide mouthed water bottles from Lixit are the best (easiest to fill & clean).

Greens: romaine lettuce, green leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuce, parsley, cilantro (no iceberg lettuce). Nothing in the cabbage family as it causes gas, which can kill the rabbit (e.g., no kale, broccoli). Wash all greens thoroughly.

Treats: very small treat, for example one baby carrot.

Tasks

Note on Animal Care Sheet when each rabbit is fed, watered or cleaned.

Each morning:

First thing in the morning, check all cages to make sure all rabbits are ok. If rabbits have water bowls, top them off. Turn fans on/off as specified by supervisor. Then do the following.

Clean all rabbits, as follows. Dump litter from litter box into trash can, wipe down litter box (use water/vinegar spray bottle), fill with new litter. Wipe down floor of cage (use water or water/vinegar spray bottle). Do not be perfect (since will be cleaning every day). Put litter box in back of cage.

After all rabbits have been cleaned, with clean hands, feed & water all rabbits, as follows. Put 1/2 cup (100 ml) (or unlimited, see below) of food pellets into food bowl. Put food bowl away

from water. Fill water bottle to the top. For all water bottles, tap end of water bottle tube to make sure it is functioning. For water bowls, dump water, wipe down, fill.

Put one small handful of hay into the near corner of the litter box. Put large handful of hay onto the floor of the cage next to but outside of the litter box, away from water. Give enough to last 24 hours.

Give one treat & one handful of greens on floor of cage (not in food bowl).

Sweep floor of room. Empty trash cans. Make a final round of all the cages to be sure all cages are latched and all rabbits have food & water.

Inventory consumables & make list of needed items. Also include equipment that is needed. Give list to supervisor.

Midday:

If it is hot, put ice bottles into cages. During quiet times, turn off lights.

Evening:

Remove ice bottles, wipe off, put into freezer. Put 1/2 cup (100 ml) (or unlimited, see below) of food into food bowl. If water bottle very low, fill. For all water bottles, tap end of water bottle tube to make sure it is functioning. Top off water bowls. Give handful of hay if no hay left in cage. Give one treat & one handful of greens.

Make a final round of all the cages to be sure all cages are latched and all rabbits have food & water. Turn lights out. Turn fans on/off as specified by supervisor.

Throughout the day:

Top off water bowls. Socialize the rabbits by petting them or taking them out for exercise, if you have permission.

Other

On whiteboard, write down: emergency numbers, supervisor & rabbit specialists' names & numbers, animal number & cage # of each rabbit (update when rabbits come & go).

For rabbits under 8 months old, nursing females, pregnant females and very thin rabbits (get permission) give unlimited food pellets & put sign on cage.

Do not pick up a rabbit unless you know how to do it properly.

Rabbits younger than 2 months need special care; see http://curiousbunny.com/newborn_rabbits_detail.pdf.

If not introduced properly, rabbits will often fight. Do not put rabbits together unless they have already been living together.

If there is a rabbit with a medical issue, mark on Animal Care Sheet (& highlight it), put sign on clipboard on cage and note on whiteboard. Report all injuries (rabbit or human) to supervisor. If a rabbit needs special care (e.g., special food), put sign on clipboard on cage. Make sure power cords are taped to the ground to reduce trip hazard & to ensure rabbits do not chew them.

Remind workers to shower & wash clothes before interacting with their own animals (to reduce disease transmission). Remind workers to drink enough water & take breaks.

Plan what to do if you need to evacuate quickly. Have enough carriers on hand. Decide how to label them. Plan where they will go & how they & their paperwork will be transported.

When transporting a rabbit in a carrier, put a small blanket on the floor so the rabbit does not slide around.

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