

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

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### **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 that is 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 (over 80 deg F (27 C), put them in an air-conditioned room, although not with cold air blowing directly on them. They can tolerate cold temperatures (down to 55 deg F (13 C). The room should be dark overnight (no night light). It's best to house them inside, but if they are housed outside, they should be in an area that is fenced (in case a rabbit gets out) & that is protected from heat & rain.

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, hidey box (if there is room) and clipboard attached to cage. Turn these items upside down to make to clear it is a clean cage, ready for a rabbit. Put cage card (clean) on clipboard. For each new rabbit, fill litter box with litter, fill food bowl, fill water bottle/bowl, attach paperwork to clipboard & remove "clean" cage card.

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 with 2 workers. Two scoops (dispense 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), spray bottle with Rescue Solution, two watering cans with long spouts (fill water bowls), disposable gloves (various sizes), cleaning supply cart, several fans, 1 package of pee pads (for transport, not for cages), 2 sets of measuring cups (1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 1 cup (60-237 ml)).

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), cage cards (clean, dirty, special food, medical (vet visit needed), caution (behavior issues)), these care instructions.

Straight-sided litter boxes, water bottles with hangers (or non-tip water bowls), non-tip food bowls. For food & water bowls, heavy ceramic crocks (4"-5" (10-13 cm) diameter) are best. If have to use metal bowls, use ones that have sides that slant outward at the bottom (bottom is wider than the top). Otherwise they will tip easily. Don't use metal bowls with a rubber bottom (rabbits will chew them).

Hidey box can be cardboard box with top flaps removed. Best to have bottom flaps glued, as opposed to taped, so rabbits do not chew the tape. Turn upside down & cut out entry holes on all sides.

If use water bottles, 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). The metal hangers that come with water bottles sometimes fall off. In that case, make a hanger by connecting 2 zip ties into a circle that is attached to the bars of the cage. You can then slide the zip tie circle up & down when removing/installing the water bottle.

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 & crumpled paper.

## **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, use Oxbow adult rabbit food (adults) or Oxbow young rabbit food (under 8 months, pregnant, nursing). If you have to use a different brand, 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, you can use it short term. If you can see bits of dried fruit and nuts, do not use that. It is candy to the rabbits. If you only have adult or young rabbit food, or guinea pig food, you can use it short term for all ages, as long as it doesn't have bits of dried fruit in it.

Paper-based litter or wood stove pellets (not clay-based or wood shavings).

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

Animal Care Sheet should have: initials, date, time (24 hour), fed, watered, cleaned, peed (+/-), pooped (+/-), comments (percent of food/water used). Note 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. Check for safety issues (e.g., power cords). 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. Tap end of water bottle tube to make sure it is functioning. For water bowls, dump water, wipe down, fill.

Put two large handfuls 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 & two handfuls 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. Count all rabbits & empty cages & put total on whiteboard.

### 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 & two handfuls of greens.

Make a final round of all the cages to be sure all cages are latched and all rabbits have food & water. Turn all 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 number of each rabbit (update when rabbits come & go). Draw map of cages (showing cage #'s).

For rabbits under 8 months old, nursing females, pregnant females and very thin rabbits (get permission) give unlimited food pellets & put cage card (special food) on clipboard. If rabbit is to be fed owner supplied food, put animal # on food bag & put cage card (special food) on clipboard.

Rabbits can be severely injured if not handled properly. Do not pick up a rabbit unless you know how to do it properly.

Ask supervisor about use of gloves (probably change after handling each rabbit).

Rabbits younger than 2 months need special care; see  
[http://curiousbunny.com/newborn\\_rabbits\\_detail.pdf](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.

When a cage is no longer needed (rabbit has left), put cage card (dirty) on clipboard. When have time, clean out all debris. Use water/vinegar solution to remove urine & poop. Spray with Rescue Solution, let sit for 5 minutes. When spraying Rescue Solution, have enough ventilation so rabbits will not breathe in the fumes. For food & water bowls/bottles, then rinse with water. For all, air or wipe dry. Then setup cage as described under Setup of Room.

Rabbits can have a bacterium (*Bordetella bronchiseptica*) that causes respiratory disease in guinea pigs (which can be fatal) but the rabbits do not show any symptoms. Thus always handle guinea pigs before the rabbits. Keep them far apart if they are in the same room.

If there is a rabbit with a medical issue (not eating/drinking, discharge from nose or eyes, fleas/ticks, etc.), mark on Animal Care Sheet (& highlight it), put cage card (medical) on clipboard and note on whiteboard. Report all injuries (rabbit or human) to supervisor. If a

rabbit has a behavior issue, put cage card (caution) on clipboard. 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 & the paperwork will be transported.

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

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Rev 240911