

What to do if you lose your pet

by Christine Watt United Paws of Tillamook | Posted Tillamook Headlight Herald - Tuesday, April 24, 2012 4:28 pm

The number one best thing you can do to safeguard your pets -- before they get lost -- is to microchip them. It's not an expensive undertaking and could save you time and effort to find the animal ... and heartbreak if you're unsuccessful. If your pet is turned in to Animal Control or ends up with a veterinarian or in a shelter, the microchip will show up on a scanner, and you will then be contacted. However, a microchip is only as good as its current details. If you move or have a second home, be sure the microchip company has all your up-to-date contact information. Pets, especially dogs, must wear collars with a rabies tag and county license. If a dog wearing these forms of ID is found, you should be reunited quickly. However, collars can come off, so don't rely on the IDs on a cat's or dog's collar to reunite you. That's where the microchip comes in. Even if your pets are microchipped and were wearing a collar with ID but have gone missing, there's no time to lose. Don't wait until tomorrow to start searching. Here are some guidelines to help.

1) Canvas the neighborhood on foot, both day and night. When animals are injured, they might hide during the day. Talk to all neighbors, the letter carrier, landscapers, local children, trash collectors, meter readers, newspaper delivery persons, as many people as frequent your neighborhood and its environs. Have a card with your phone number and a description or, better, a photo of the pet to hand out to as many people as possible. Be sure and check ditches, sewers, vacant lots, and other such places where pets could get trapped or hide if frightened or hurt.

2) Call your local police and fire department and the sheriff.

3) Call all veterinarians in the area. If the pet's been injured, a good Samaritan may have taken your animal to a vet, or someone may have called local vets to report a found pet.

4) Contact animal shelters, humane societies, rescue groups, spay/neuter groups. Take a photograph of the pet to them with your phone number. Most keep a list of lost pets. United Paws immediately sends out an alert via email, among other actions, to try and reunite guardians with their lost pets. It's advisable to visit animal shelters, because your idea of a "collie-mix" may be different from theirs.

5) Put "Lost" posters up showing a picture of the missing pet and a detailed description (collar color, fur color, short-hair/long-hair, curly tail, distinctive markings, temperament—friendly, aggressive, timid?) in pet supply stores, supermarkets, local shops, beauty salons, community centers, anywhere and everywhere you can, and don't forget your phone number. Offer a reward.

6) Call local radio stations; many run "lost pet" announcements for free. Place an advertisement in the local newspaper as soon as you can. Don't forget to check the "Found" ads.

7) Cats usually don't travel far from their territory, which isn't more than a few blocks in any direction. They may have been spooked and be hiding under a deck nearby. Check sheds and garages, especially of holiday rental homes. The cat could have gone inside to investigate and be locked in. Call the pet's name frequently around empty buildings, then listen quietly for a soft familiar meow in response.

8) Dogs can travel, especially if they've been scared by gunshot or fireworks and have bolted, so don't confine your search area to local areas. A panicking dog could run as far as another county. Even a cat could have been investigating a parked truck that took off with the cat inside and be miles away. So check with neighboring county shelters, animal groups, and law enforcement. Has anybody moved in your neighborhood? Could the cat have hitched a ride in the moving truck and be in another state? If so, start the search at all points the truck stopped where a cat could have escaped; for example, if the trucker stopped at a truck stop with a restaurant and opened the truck up, call that restaurant and any other places at the truck stop in the case the cat jumped out of the truck, then send posters. Keep checking back.

9) Be persistent and don't give up. Animals turn up months after they've gone missing, sometimes in the strangest places and you have no idea how they managed it.

10) Once you've found your pet, be sure and let everybody know so the search can be called off. Besides, we all love a happy ending.

If you find a lost pet, please do the same as suggested above. Please care for the pet and remember the pet is likely scared so needs to be confined in a calm, safe, comfortable place and, if injured, taken to a veterinarian.