RCW 38.52.610 Emergency shelters—Accommodation of companion animals. (1) A political subdivision, under existing plan structures, shall, to the extent practicable based on available resources and site-specific circumstances, address cosheltering for emergency shelters in each update of its local comprehensive emergency management plan required by RCW 38.52.070.

(2) A political subdivision, under existing plan structures, shall, to the extent practicable based on available resources and site-specific circumstances, identify emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with companion animals.

(3) Whenever a political subdivision identifies any number of emergency shelters in response to a natural disaster or extreme weather event, it should, to the extent practicable, identify at least one coshelter.

(4) An emergency shelter that is identified to accommodate persons with companion animals must have safety procedures regarding the sheltering of companion animals and comply with disaster assistance policies and procedures published by the federal emergency management agency.

(5) A political subdivision shall provide companion animal emergency preparedness information on its website, including:

(a) To the extent practicable, whether each identified emergency shelter can accommodate companion animals;

(b) Information for creating a companion animal evacuation plan and emergency checklist, consistent with the federal emergency management agency recommendations; and

(c) Identification of local organizations that provide emergency companion animal assistance.

(6) The following definitions apply to this section:

(a) "Companion animal" means a domesticated animal, such as a dog or cat, that is commonly kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes;

(b) "Coshelter" means a temporary shelter that allows an individual to stay in an adjacent area or the same facility as a companion animal;

(c) "Emergency shelter" means a temporary location that provides basic shelter for individuals affected by an emergency or disaster; and

(d) "Existing plan structure" means planning documents describing how political subdivisions, in collaboration with nonprofit organizations, and state and federal government, will provide emergency shelter and temporary housing to individuals displaced by a disaster. [2025 c 80 s 2.]

Findings—Intent—2025 c 80: "The legislature finds that natural disasters and extreme weather events, including wildfire, flooding, earthquakes, extreme heat, and extreme cold present severe risks to public health and safety in Washington.

The legislature further finds that pets that are companion animals are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions, including risk of heatstroke-related illness and death.

The legislature further finds that many families consider their companion animals to be family members. One of the most significant factors affecting evacuation decisions is companion animal ownership. Companion animal owners may refuse evacuation, attempt to reenter evacuated sites to rescue their companion animals, and experience

grief, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder due to separation from their companion animal during an emergency. In addition, zoonotic disease risks increase when companion animals are abandoned or left to roam during an evacuation.

The legislature further finds that gaps in public preparedness and cosheltering opportunities during a disaster or extreme weather event increase the risk to public health and safety.

The legislature further finds that partnerships with nongovernmental organizations support emergency planning and preparedness and may be used to support identification and operation of coshelters.

Therefore, the legislature intends to provide guidance in increasing public preparedness and identifying shelters that can accommodate companion animals so that in the event of a disaster or extreme weather event, Washington residents will not have to choose between seeking safety and staying with their companion animals." [2025 c 80 s 1.]