

Pet Sheltering: Building Community Response



When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, a significant number of citizens put themselves in danger when they refused to evacuate their flooded and destroyed homes because they didn't want to abandon their pets. Many others were forced to leave without their pets, adding to the anguish for these hurricane victims who had already lost so much.

In 2006, Congress passed the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act, requiring state and local governments to incorporate pets and service animals into disaster planning. This unique legislation provided a wonderful opportunity for American Red Cross Chapters to join local community partners in preparing for the full scope of a disaster response.

The American Red Cross understands the importance of pets to their owners. We are working with public and private organizations, as well as individuals dedicated to animal care in local communities, to assist concerned pet owners during disasters. In addition to community-based organizations, we are partnering with national organizations that can be valuable resources to owners and communities in planning for pet care during disasters.

This document describes our role in this important relief work, while noting that disaster response is a local effort. As such, it should be designed locally in collaboration with regional and national entities. Chapters of the American Red Cross have been reaching out to those agencies and personnel active in pet sheltering. As the leader in disaster work, the subject matter expert in sheltering, and more importantly a concerned member of the community, we are actively involved in developing, practicing, and implementing disaster pet care initiatives.

THE RED CROSS ROLE

The mission of the Red Cross in providing disaster sheltering is to provide for as many people as possible in a safe environment. Due to health and safety concerns, the Red Cross does not allow animals other than service animals inside of its disaster or evacuation shelters. In addition, the Red Cross does not assume primary responsibility for providing alternative arrangements for pets. The Red Cross does appreciate the sense of responsibility and interdependence that pet owners feel toward their pets, especially in times of disaster. Our role, as the service provider to the general public, is to ensure that pet sheltering initiatives and plans developed at the local, county, or state level are integrated to the greatest extent possible into our disaster service delivery. Although we cannot physically host pets within our shelters, we support the proper local agencies that specialize in animal care in their role to shelter and ensure the safety of pets. We accomplish this through two key areas: communication and mass care.

Communications

When a disaster strikes, Red Cross shelters and chapters become central hubs for information. Citizens will turn to the Red Cross for information on any kind of disaster relief. We strive to provide the best and most accurate data possible. The Red Cross provides information to bring peace of mind to stranded travelers and displaced families searching for a place to protect their family pet. The Red Cross can provide prearranged, simple resources in cooperation with local agencies and government. Each chapter works to distribute comprehensive resource listings for animal welfare, animal boarding sites and/or local veterinarians in order to provide information or referrals to pet owners who contact the Red Cross for assistance. Chapters are also prepared to provide referral information to those impacted by disaster that may need temporary care for their pets while staying at a Red Cross shelter.

Mass Care

The Red Cross provides mass care (sheltering and feeding) to those impacted by disaster and first responders. Our area of expertise includes caring for people during times of disaster. In situations where animal care organizations need support with feeding staff, volunteers or those impacted by disaster, Red Cross chapters or disaster relief operations will work with those organizations to provide mass care support. This could include providing mobile feeding for shelter residents, loaning cots for the duration of an event or providing comfort kits. In any case, we aim to be proactive in our response and offer that support to our community partners by coordinating with local humane societies, animal control and the emergency operations center to stay abreast of those locations needing support.

CONTINUED RED CROSS EFFORTS

Although the Red Cross does not admit pets into Red Cross shelters, the Red Cross is committed to an ongoing effort to assist pet owners in arranging for adequate shelter for their pets in time of disaster. Additionally, Red Cross actively seeks those local partnerships that will enhance the ability of the community to develop effective plans for the care and feeding of pets or companion animals. Innovative solutions such as co-located sheltering options have proven successful. Through a partnership with local animal and pet organizations, these pets can be sheltered in a facility co-located, but separate from the emergency shelter for people.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

National Animal Rescue and Sheltering Coalition (NARSC)

American Humane Association (AHA)

American Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)

Best Friends Animal Society

Code 3 Associates

www.code3associates.org

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

National Animal Control Association (NACA) National Office

www.nacanet.org

Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA)

www.sawanetwork.org

United Animal Nations (UAN/EARS)

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