

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.

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, there are national organizations that can be valuable resources to owners and communities in planning for pet care during disasters.

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 provides a wonderful opportunity for Red Cross chapters to join local community partners in preparing for the full scope of a disaster response. The success of this initiative depends on both the proper coordination between agencies and a full understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each agency.

This document and its tables offer some general suggestions regarding our role in this important relief work. Disaster response is a local effort. As such, it should be designed locally in collaboration with regional and national entities. Red Cross Chapters should begin 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 must be 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, however, recognize and appreciate the importance of pets to their owners. We also 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 can support the proper local agencies that specialize in animal care in their

role to shelter and ensure the safety of pets. We can do this through two key areas—communications and mass care.

Communications

When a disaster strikes, Red Cross shelters and chapters become central hubs for information. People will turn to the Red Cross for information on any kind of disaster relief. We must be prepared to provide the best and most accurate data possible. The Red Cross can provide 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 governments. Each chapter should develop (or utilize a partner information resource) and 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 should also be 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. All Red Cross service delivery sites should have this and other referral information available.

Mass Care

The Red Cross provides mass care (sheltering and feeding) to those impacted by disaster and first responders. Our areas of expertise include 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 should work with those organizations to provide mass care support for them. This could include providing mobile feeding for shelter residents, loaning cots for the duration of an event or providing comfort kits. In any case, this effort will require coordination with local humane societies, animal control and the emergency operations center to stay abreast of those locations needing Mass Care support. Be proactive in your response and offer that support to our community partners.

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 chapters and other service delivery units should actively seek 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. Clear guidelines about the role of each organization can help to mitigate future issues. Innovative solutions, such as co-located sheltering options, have proven successful; however, chapters must be clear of their boundaries in service delivery. 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.

Chapter Innovations

Red Cross chapters, in collaboration with community partners, have been developing innovative solutions to support the care of pets. The following examples illustrate two effective programs.

Example 1: A Coordinated Response—Parallel Shelters

The Capital Area Chapter in Tallahassee, Fla. has a fantastic partnership with a local animal care organization allowing for a separately managed pet shelter that is located in proximity to and coordinated with a Red Cross shelter.

Big Bend Disaster Animal Response Team (DART), a partner of the Capital Area Chapter in Tallahassee that specializes in animal care, is responsible for establishing and operating the pet friendly shelter at the request of the Red Cross. Big Bend DART has a representative located at the chapter emergency operation center during the initial activation of a disaster response and will deploy resources upon request. A DART representative identifies the location for the pet friendly shelter and acts as a liaison to the Red Cross chapter. The DART representative and the Red Cross chapter then make the decision about opening a pet friendly shelter. The Big Bend DART representative also regularly coordinates with the Red Cross shelter manager.

Persons being evacuated who have not made other arrangements for their pets may arrive at Red Cross operated emergency shelters with their pets. The Big Bend Disaster Animal Response Team, in turn, receives the pets in a co-located but separate facility and takes responsibility for their care.

Example 2: Integrated Emergency Operations Plans Annex

The Central Minnesota Chapter has assisted its community in the development of a pet sheltering annex. This annex outlines clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the chapter in cooperating with the animal care organizations in the community. The end result is the promotion of successful care of pets during disasters.

General Annex Provisions

American Red Cross Central Minnesota Chapter Roles

- Develop and maintain a resource list for animal welfare, boarding sites and/or local veterinarians in order to provide information or referrals to pet owners who contact the Red Cross for assistance.
- Provide referral information to shelter residents who may need temporary care for their pets while staying at the Red Cross shelter.
- Provide pet sheltering information to clients at the Red Cross shelter registration desk.
- Provide assistance with making food available to animal shelter workers through ongoing mass feeding efforts.
- Coordinate with local emergency management and animal control in disseminating information to the media regarding the availability and location of emergency animal sheltering.
- Offer pet first aid courses to the community to support preparedness of pet owners to care for their animals in emergencies and to augment training of potential volunteers.

CONTACTS

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