

## Pets and Hazardous Materials

It is not uncommon for hazardous material (hazmat) incidents to occur on farms in disasters. Examples of typical hazardous materials found on farms include pesticides, herbicides, fertilizer, petroleum products, solvents, detergents, chlorine, anhydrous ammonia, and veterinary drugs. Disaster responders charged with the care of animals should be aware that hazmat certification is required to deal with such exposures. Local responder groups that commonly are qualified are fire departments, law enforcement agencies, allied medical and health professionals, public works departments, county health agencies, and county agriculture departments. Without appropriate training veterinarians and other responders for the care of animals in disasters are not qualified to deal with hazmat spills.

Pets that have been directly exposed to hazardous chemicals or floodwaters, have ingested toxins, or have had other types of exposure should be treated with great concern for human safety. Hazardous material (hazmat)-contaminated pets are fomites that can expose many people to these chemicals. This is particularly a problem when exposed animals are rescued. These pets frequently are passed among rescuers and bystanders as a sign of success and encouragement. However, when hugging or cuddling the pet, the rescuers may become contaminated. This contamination puts rescue workers out of action while they are being decontaminated so as not to endanger others.

Human exposure to contaminated animals must be prevented if possible. Advice from experts can help an owner or emergency worker minimize the hazmat effect on an animal's health.

## Public and Rescuer Safety

Some pets are dangerous to people, to other animals, and to the environment. Only persons who are qualified and experienced should handle dangerous animals. Some examples of dangerous animals are certain breeds of dogs or individual pets with bad temperaments and uncommon pets such as large cats (e.g., cougars, lions), bears, and many types of reptiles and birds (e.g., macaws, cockatoos, ostriches). Although the owner is ultimately responsible for the care of these animals and the safety of others around them, this is of little practical help if the owner is not present. However, the principles of emergency management should still prevail; responder and public safety is the first goal, followed by the need to save property. Many communities have addressed the issue of caring for exotic animals in disasters by enrolling veterinarians from accredited zoos in the emergency operations plan as the primary group to oversee the capture and rescue of such animals. In rare cases pets can transmit diseases to people (zoonotic diseases). Table 27-5 lists some important zoonotic diseases.

**Table 27-5** Zoonotic diseases and injuries

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Coliform bacteria
<i>Salmonella</i>
<i>Campylobacter</i>
<i>Cryptosporidium</i>
<i>Giardia</i>
Ringworm
Rabies
Vector-borne diseases (e.g., equine encephalitis)
Animal bites and injuries

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This list of diseases that can be transferred from animals to people is by no means complete. A local veterinarian or a public health official can provide more information.

**Environmental Risks**

Smaller pets, especially insects, may present a threat to the environment. After Hurricane Andrew it was estimated that up to 40 new species of animals were introduced into the Everglades. Many of those probably perished, but others may emerge decades later as pests without natural predators or other means of control.