

Planning Missteps

- Occasionally individual veterinarians, humane societies, or veterinary medical associations (VMAs) have tried to become the lead agency rather than work under the guidance of their local EMA. Individuals who have not worked under the guidance of emergency management officials can create public interest in their plans, but in the event of a disaster they are usually unable to enroll their members effectively or safely in the official response to disasters. To be involved, individuals should be represented in the emergency management team, EOC, EOP, and incident management system. A particular problem with VMAs assuming responsibility without being guided by emergency management is that VMAs usually have annually rotating committee chairs. This is a recipe for disaster, not a solution to disaster management.
- National humane and veterinary groups have on occasion been given roles in local or state EOPs. This strategy is ineffective because none of these national groups can realistically make themselves available at the local or state level upon request, especially if they are asked to respond to several incidents simultaneously. Local representatives of national groups may be available, but they often cannot draw on national resources. The role of national groups during the development of state and local disaster plans is as consultants. They have little if any role as participants in the local response to disasters.
- The first exercise should not be more than a tabletop exercise. A full-scale exercise should not be attempted until other types of exercise have been rehearsed. It is strongly advised that before attempting any large-scale exercise, planners attend a FEMA Exercise Planning Workshop.
- Many rural communities do not have a department of animal control. Frequently animal control is under the jurisdiction of the local law enforcement. In a disaster these resources will not be adequate to deal with stray animals and therefore an alternative plan is needed quickly. A common error has arisen when local authorities have called on outside groups for assistance without first identifying or consulting with their own local resources. Preferably, local qualified persons and resources will be recruited to help. Examples include local veterinarians and the local humane society.
- Veterinarians and humane shelters should not be expected to bear the costs of their efforts if they are called on to help in a disaster. Both need to have income to survive. The compensation should be made clear at the time a request is made. How to address this is discussed in the business section.
- Conflicts or competition may arise among responder groups. In some communities multiple humane shelters may be competing for limited resources, reducing the potential to have a single representative. Problems have arisen when the different groups compete or one tries to dominate the situation. This is not conducive to collective and improved care for animals and their owners in disasters. The issue should be dealt with in an open manner. All groups should be invited and given a clear charge and description of the mission. Areas of single and joint responsibility should be worked out among the various groups. Usually as time progresses, the groups that have

the resources and commitment emerge as natural leaders. The FEMA course on EOC-ICS interface may also help in the establishment of a unified command.

- Avoid conflicts between national and local groups because local persons who did not represent the community have sought unneeded help from national groups.