

## **The Impact of Earthquakes on Veterinary Practices and Animal Shelters**

Additional complications arise for the care of earthquake victims if hospitals are affected. Damaged veterinary facilities, animal shelters, or other animal-related businesses may no longer have staff who can come to work. This greatly compromises the capability with which animal care can be provided. In anticipation of this problem, local emergency management agencies, veterinarians, and animal shelter operators should work together to designate “critical animal care facilities.” These designated facilities should be the primary sites from which to provide care for animals affected by an earthquake. These facilities should be built or retrofitted to the highest standards of current building codes to reduce the potential loss of animal care services in disasters. Animal care facilities should also enter into agreements with one another so that critical care cases can be referred and transported for appropriate level of care away from the affected area. It is not appropriate to provide emergency care to animals when there are functional veterinary hospitals in the vicinity, and there always are.

Much of the research that has been published about humans in earthquakes indicates clearly that local persons who are on site at the time of the earthquake are the major group of rescuers who find and attempt to save trapped victims. This probably applies to trapped animals as well. With this in mind, the emphasis on veterinary medical earthquake preparedness should be on teaching residents how to provide lifesaving human and veterinary First Aid and how to recognize and euthanize severely injured animals. Education of residents of earthquake-affected areas is likely to be the most important means to improve animals’ well-being in earthquakes.

With appropriate local preparedness, it is unlikely that outside teams will be needed to go to earthquake sites to save or care for animals. The likely role for outside consultants should be to help restore businesses, assist local teams in the care of healthy animals and their owners, and foster stray animals (under the supervision of the local animal control agency).



A veterinarian’s truck was severely damaged when a slab of concrete fell on it. The truck had been parked overnight in the garage.



Treatment of animals under field conditions is necessary only under extreme conditions, when lifesaving procedures are indicated. In most cases owners can transport their animals to functional veterinary practices.