

Volunteering for Animals in Disasters

There are several approaches to the way in which disaster relief for animals is organized. Most commonly, “Emergent” volunteers spontaneously come forward immediately to help and State and country programs. Table 26-1 summarizes stated and assumed responsibilities of groups responding to animal needs in disasters.

Emergent Volunteers

Emergent volunteer groups typically arise in large numbers to offer their help during the immediate response phase of a disaster. They are usually composed of private citizens and often operate on their own rather than within the existing organization of emergency management. Nevertheless, emergent volunteers (individuals and groups) fulfill a critical role and are of great importance during the first 24 hours after a major disaster. These are the golden hours.

Golden Hours

Emergent volunteers are the people who are most likely to pull entrapped victims out of rubble after an earthquake, save the lives of flood victims, provide First Aid to tornado victims, or sound the alert in a hazardous materials incident. Emergent volunteers also provide the majority of care for animals in disasters. In short, the people who are present locally are most likely to be the ones to provide hands-on search and rescue in disasters. For animals this is likely to include capture, rescue, and emergency medical care.

The effectiveness of groups that are not present at the site at the time of the disaster and claim to be able to provide rescue and emergency medical care services for animals should be questioned. This is because their services are likely to arrive more than 24 hours after a disaster, when most of the critical care and rescue already will have occurred. Evidence for this comes from human disaster management. After the Oklahoma City and World Trade Center bombings all victims who needed medical attention had been received at local hospitals within 2 hours of the blasts. Other examples of the capabilities of local responders present at the scene are described in the chapters on specific hazards. Emergent volunteers and groups that appear after the first 24 hours become involved in cleanup and recovery operations. In the case of animals this is most likely to include feeding and housing.

Directing the Energy of Emergent Volunteers

Following are examples of existing organizations’ being unable to make the best use of help offered by emergent volunteers:

- After the 1989 Loma Prieta, California, earthquake over 7000 volunteers emerged within hours wanting to help at local shelters. Because of the insufficient number of supervisors to coordinate the emergent volunteers, many of them left in frustration about not being able to help. In the same incident similar problems were encountered by the Santa Cruz Office of Emergency Services and the Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz.
- During the 1992 Huntington Beach, California, oil spill concerned veterinarians were not allowed to help oil soaked birds because the veterinarians were not certified by the California Office of Emergency Services to deal with hazardous materials.

Emergent volunteers are a valuable resource in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. To harness the energy of these willing and concerned citizens, emergency managers should direct the volunteers to a staging area. Here workers are selected based on the needs identified by the Incident Manager (Commander) and are transported to the areas where they can help. At these staging areas emergency management agencies (EMAs) often have capabilities, such as through

computers in police cars, to do identification, security, and background checks on volunteers before they are sworn in and dispatched.

Occasionally outside groups have tried to assume similar responsibilities for managing volunteers. This can lead to conflicts with groups already in the community, especially if the local groups have limited experience in disasters. To avert this problem, communities should establish guidelines for intervention by outside groups. The authority to provide that guidance should be established by local groups in collaboration with their local EMA before the disaster strikes.



A horse is rescued from a wind-damaged stable. People at the site of a disaster are those most likely to be involved in the rescue of animals. (Photo by Lynn Caldwell.)

If outside groups wish to help, they should report to the officials of the local area and clearly state what resources (personnel, physical and financial) they are offering to an affected community and how these will be made available. The effectiveness of help from outside groups is determined by the level of local preparedness. In the event of a disaster local and outside groups can enter into agreements that define in advance how the groups will handle recognition in the media and how the outside groups can help, financially or through personnel and physical resources.

Emergent efforts from local groups can be diminished when they are not recognized beyond the local media. By contrast outside groups often arrive with access to national news organizations, which may emphasize the efforts of the groups that have come to “help” disaster victims. As a result, local groups may receive only limited credit for their efforts and donations may be diverted to the well-publicized outside organizations. The frustration is exacerbated when teams of outside groups do not operate clearly under the guidance and supervision of local authorities and agencies. The care of animals has suffered from this situation. In numerous cases outside groups have received recognition and financial support for their actions but have failed to pass these on to the affected communities.

Table 26-1 Organized responder groups that provide care for animals during disasters

Item	Organization			
	Veterinary medical assistance teams	State planning groups	National humane groups	Animal control
Authority	Agreements with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, USDA-APHIS, and ARC	State emergency management agencies	AHA through precedent with the Dept. of War, 1916, mutual aid agreement with ARC; HSUS mutual aid agreement with ARC; UAN; self-proclaimed	
National				
State				
Local				
Source of recognition	FEMA (ESF-8)	State emergency management agencies	Public campaigning	Through local ordinances Local ordinances
Activation/ termination	After presidential disaster declaration	After gubernatorial disaster declaration or when multiple state agencies are alerted	Self-deployed	Local ordinances, often through law enforcement
Chain of command	Response integrated into existing state and local disaster preparedness plans	Integrated response to existing state and local disaster preparedness plans	Own initiative	Integrated response to existing state and local disaster preparedness plans
Qualifications	Veterinarians and veterinary technicians who are pre-enrolled with federal government and AVMA	Veterinarians who are enrolled with state VMA disaster preparedness committee	Varying degrees of volunteer training to groups' own standards	Through local authority
Liability	Covered as temporary federal employee under Emergency Support Function 8	Covered as temporary employee of state as emergency responder	No coverage; some provide limited personal injury coverage	Employee of local authority
Accountability	To the President of the United States	To the governor of the state	Through mission statement of own organization	To the local chief elected official
Preparedness efforts for organization members	AVMA Emergency Response Force Guide, continuing education for veterinarians	State VMA disaster preparedness committees, continuing education for veterinarians	Continuing education of employees and volunteers	Often on-the-job training
Preparedness efforts for the public	Disaster preparedness literature	Some states provide awareness literature	Disaster preparedness literature, publicity campaign, workshops, selling of commercial items	Varies among localities
Funding sources	Federal government sponsors VMAT training and deployment, private donations, AVMF	State emergency management agency sponsors official responder training and deployment	Private donations	Local employee and charitable donations

AHA, American Humane Association, previously Red Star; ARC, American Red Cross; AVMA, American Veterinary Medical Association; AVMF, American Veterinary Medical Foundation; HSUS, Humane Society of the United States; UAN, United Animal Nations; USDA-APHIS, U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; FEMA (ESF-8), Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Health and Human Services, Emergency Support Function 8.