

Some Key Elements in Developing a Disaster Plan for Animal Care

Identify the most likely disasters in your area

Preparing for all disasters—although it may not seem practical—would be tremendously helpful in dealing with disasters actually encountered. Possible disasters to consider include: earthquake, fire, flood, landslide, oil spill, toxic spill, disease outbreak (domestic or wild animal, human), riot, act of terrorism, bomb, plane crash, explosion, extreme heat or cold, drought, heavy snowfall, avalanche, high wind, tornado, hurricane, volcanic eruption, or nuclear fallout.

Consider the impact of each disaster you have identified. Determine the areas likely to be affected by different disasters, average duration of disaster and problems that may arise because of the disaster to confound the issue. For example, an earthquake only lasts seconds with aftershocks over a period of days, but the damage can be severe. Often damage from the earthquake can lead to secondary problems such as spreading fire, contaminated water and extensive power outages. Remember, anytime warnings are put out to the human population or evacuations undertaken, sister plans for animals should be activated.

Assemble a disaster response team (see page 45)

A personnel list should be developed prior to any disaster. Individuals included in your disaster response team should be farm advisors, 4-H Youth Development advisors, other appropriate DANR personnel, and veterinarians or other individuals who may strengthen your disaster response team. Special skills, training or experience can determine where volunteers may best be utilized. Work with the Health Department to insure all animal responders have pre-exposure rabies and tetanus vaccinations made available to them.

Survey existing laws

Certain agencies and groups are designated by law to handle certain situations in the state involving animals (e.g. control of stray animals may be the responsibility of county animal control agencies or local humane organizations.). The disaster committee should research the responsibilities of various agencies (see “Role of the California Office of Emergency Services,” etc. on page 7). If there are any overlapping functions, a written memorandum of understanding (see page 12) should be developed that specifically identifies each agency’s function.

Local regulations regarding foster or adoption of lost or abandoned pets should be defined. Regulations governing carcass disposal should also be reviewed. Natural resources and wildlife agencies have legal responsibility for wildlife, thus care of wildlife affected by disasters must be coordinated through these agencies. Volunteers may become “Disaster Service Workers” registered with the Office of Emergency Services (OES). Volunteer veterinarians may be immune from liability for rendering services in an emergency under Article 2 of the Veterinary Practice Act.

Take an animal census

A census should be taken of the animal population in your area. Include the location, type, and number of animals, including all livestock and poultry. Once this information is assembled, it should be keyed onto a map for easy reference. Emergency responders will be able to use the map to know immediately the location, type and number of animals involved in an emergency area.

Companion animals: Calculate the approximate number of companion animal located in your county as follows. First visit the California Department of Finance webpage (www.dof.ca.gov) and use the demographics page to determine the number of households in your county. Enter this number in the blank spaces marked (1).

AVMA determined the average number of pets per household and distribution of pets to be:

	Percentage of Households Owning a Pet	Number of Pets Per Household
Dogs	31.6	1.69
Cats	27.3	2.19
Birds	4.6	2.74
Horses	1.5	2.67

You can then multiply these figures together to get an estimate of companion animals in your county.

Dogs: _____(1) x 31.6% = _____ x 1.69 = _____ (3)
 Cats: _____(1) x 27.3% = _____ x 2.19 = _____ (3)
 Birds: _____(1) x 4.6% = _____ x 2.74 = _____ (3)
 Horses: _____(1) x 1.5% = _____ x 2.67 = _____ (3)

Total: add all numbers labeled with (3) _____

The Department of Natural Resources may be able to provide some estimates as to the location, type and number of feral animals in the area.

Large animals: The State Department of Agriculture can provide numbers for brucellosis tests for cattle and Coggins registrations for horses. Directly contacting commercial operations, large animal veterinarians and farriers will provide your team with the most accurate information regarding the location of animals. It will also provide you with an excellent opportunity for public education.

Once you have developed contacts with these operations, you can forward them preparedness brochures and encourage them to develop their own disaster evacuation plans. By helping them understand the risks to their operations and providing a means to decrease those risks, you can greatly decrease the impact of a disaster before it ever occurs. Once these plans are completed, they should be filed with Emergency Management or Animal Services, so that facilities can be checked by the assessment team following a disaster.

Exotics: These are defined as animals not native to the state or those normally found to be wild. The State Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission may be contacted with a list of zip codes for your county from which they can provide the number of exotics permitted in your county. However, no permits are required for a variety of pocket pets and birds, which are more appropriately classed as companion animals.

Care for exotics following a major disaster falls under the authority of the California Department of Fish and Game. Information received by your team regarding care of wildlife or exotics should be forwarded to the CDFG contact in your county.

Assess local resources for animal rescue and care

In addition to people who are willing to volunteer for animal rescue and/or animal care, team members can assist by working on committees to identify and cultivate a variety of resources (see page 45).

Determine an incident command system

An example of an incident command system is included in this guide. Individuals listed as personnel should be notified of their responsibilities, where they fall in the chain of command and how they will be directed to respond. The success of any emergency operations plan depends on the effectiveness of the chain of command. Voluntary helpers usually are plentiful at the time of a disaster. Coordinating their efforts is the challenge.

Provide alternative communications resources

Phone lines are often down during a disaster. Coordination with the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and fire, police and rescue squads is important. A “phone tree” that organizes communication should be arranged to prevent unnecessary overloading of the phone lines. Some OES offices have telephone autodiallers that they will make available to you for use instead of establishing your own phone tree.

A list of people willing to provide ham radios, cellular phones, portable satellite telephones, facsimile machines, walkie-talkies and expertise regarding their use should be obtained (page 32). Prior arrangements can be made with phone companies to establish open lines between the disaster team's headquarters and the EOC (Emergency Operations Center at the Office of Emergency Services). Communications for responding to disasters can also include pagers and numerical codes (e.g. “1111” means “meet at primary animal shelter”). Responsibility for communications can fall to the Communications Committee (page 46).

Plan for the care of injured, sick and stray animals

Care of sick or injured animals will depend on the conditions at the emergency site. In some cases, normal veterinary procedures can be used. In others, a triage system will have to be developed, especially if there are mass casualties. Decisions regarding treatment versus euthanasia should be made by a licensed veterinarian. Stray animals need to be caught and confined, or euthanized by the appropriate officials. Plans need to be developed in advance, then modified for specific circumstances during a disaster. The primary concern in handling sick, injured or stray animals should be to alleviate an animal's pain and suffering and to provide normal treatment, if possible, while minimizing injury to human beings and preventing/controlling the spread of zoonotic diseases.

Prepare a master plan for disaster

The team should develop general procedures and protocols that are appropriate for responding to any activation situation. This plan should encompass all aspects of disaster response from planning through team inactivation. Modifications to this boilerplate for each individual type of disaster should be noted, but the response will function more efficiently if the general plan is standardized.

The easiest way to develop this plan is to visualize the entire disaster response from start to finish in a sort of table-top exercise. There is a (insert type) disaster. How would the team be activated by the government? How would volunteers be contacted? Where would they meet? Do they know this location in advance? What about supplies? and so on. Repeat this procedure for a number of different types of disasters. As you do this, you will begin choreographing the response in your mind and recognizing things that can be standardized. Once it has been transcribed to paper at this point, team members can start looking for gaps in the plan and sections that require clarification.

Remember, the master plan is a work in progress. It will continue to improve with each planned exercise and each response. Don't allow the fear of missing a few details to become overwhelming. Just remind yourself of all the progress you have already made.

Provide training sessions for all key personnel

All key personnel must be educated about their responsibilities in order to function efficiently. This may be done using training sessions, handouts, and other educational modalities. Certain training courses may be required by the county OES or other agencies in order to be recognized as a partner in disaster response. Disaster Service Workers may obtain identification cards after completing the required SEMS training and filling out the necessary paperwork.

Disaster training is also provided by the CVMA at its annual meeting and in workshops advertised in the California Veterinarian (journal of the CVMA). Training is encouraged for all veterinary participants in the disaster preparedness program. In addition, the veterinary team should engage in several training exercises throughout the year—at least some of which should not be announced ahead of time. A mixture of table-top, functional and full-scale exercises should be used, all of which require written scenarios or scripts.

Table-top exercises involve running personnel through the main steps in a response and the main roles of different individuals. They are a good way to find flaws or inconsistencies in your standard operating procedures (SOPs). Like table-top exercises, *functional exercises* are generally confined to the team EOC or a classroom, but they involve more dynamic situations and players receive information as they go along. *Full-scale exercises* are basically disaster dress rehearsals. They take place in the field, tend to involve more agencies or groups, and allow the team to put everything it has learned into action.

One general recommendation on planning exercises is to contact your local OES officer before you get started. They have a lot of experience in organizing training exercises and can offer guidance and assistance in setting up exercises. Your local OES officer is also the person who will make the decision on whether to offer you access to training exercises conducted by their office.

Each exercise should begin with a team briefing—just as any activation would. This is a time to make announcements and clarify the mission. It is also a good time to distribute surveys to members which can be filled out throughout the exercise; a sample is enclosed on page 61. Once the exercise begins, it is important to have designated moderators who can monitor the progress of the exercise and make adjustments as needed. Above all, do not make an exercise so challenging that it no longer is fun for participants! Team members are volunteering their own time and won't return if they have a bad experience.

At the conclusion of each exercise, gather team members together for debriefing. Emphasize the positive things you noticed and ask others to contribute their comments and criticisms. Share suggestions and feedback that people had listed on their surveys. After debriefing, write up a summary of the exercise. List the things that need to be improved (and how you intend to improve them) as well as exceptionally strong points about the response. This will show members their feedback is taken seriously and will allow them to incorporate changes while the response is still fresh in their minds.

Designate a public information liaison

Prior to events and emergencies an individual (e.g., media liaison or public information officer) should be designated to provide information to the public as necessary. This person should be familiarized with the press release policy of their local OES office, as well as with CVMA protocol.

Complete CVMA Disaster Reports and team reports

It is important to complete CVMA disaster reports on every disaster of any size that you respond to in order to identify problems in the general response that should be addressed on a large scale. It will also facilitate collection of data for analysis on disaster medicine. Finally, collecting and reviewing this information as a team will allow you to highlight all the things your team did well and your weaknesses so

that you can improve as a team. The team report should include a variety of general and specific information, including the following:

General Information

1. Nature of the disaster
2. Date and duration of the disaster
3. Geographical Boundaries (e.g., address, county, area)
4. Number of animals affected (list by species)
5. Number of animals treated and released to owners
6. Number of fatalities (list by species)
7. Number of stray pets claimed by owners
8. Number of pets unclaimed by owners
9. Number of pets placed with new owners
10. Injuries of volunteers (if appropriate)

Veterinary Response Information

1. Number of veterinarians donating services
2. Number of registered veterinary technicians and veterinary staff donating services
3. Number of veterinary clinics that received patients (list species and number assigned to each clinic)
4. Total number of veterinary hours

Contributors: to be used for acknowledgements

1. Name
2. Address
3. Brief Description of Contribution

Develop disaster preparedness programs

Public education is your best disaster plan. By educating the public and encouraging private and professional development of disaster plans, you can greatly mitigate the impact of disasters. The final goal in developing a successful disaster plan is to educate the public sufficiently to make the plan unnecessary. There will always be individuals who need help, but the *goal* is to make your team redundant.

Encourage all veterinary clinics and services to develop written disaster plans, including tie-down systems for trucks and mobile units, regardless of their interest in assisting in disasters. If they must evacuate, pre-plan an evacuation to another clinic that is not in jeopardy. Emphasize to clinics that wish to house animals during the disaster that precautions such as hurricane shutters and proper construction of the facility are essential. All disaster plans should be submitted to the appropriate government agency for inclusion on the post-disaster assessment list.

There are a number of informative brochures at the California Department of Food and Agriculture website (www.cdfa.ca.gov) that can be printed for distribution to local veterinarians, livestock producers and youth groups. Other helpful information is included in the Public Education Section of this guide.

Your team might increase public awareness by encouraging pet supply stores to develop animal disaster preparedness kits for display in a prominent location. Stores might offer a 10% discount on the complete sale for anyone purchasing such a kit to help increase public awareness while improving the stores' public relations.

Forming Your Veterinary Response Team

1. Call each veterinary clinic in your area and ask if you can mail/fax a veterinary questionnaire (see page 59) about your new Veterinary Disaster Team (VDT).
2. Invite your staff and clients to join your VDT. Identify and assign support functions that can be handled by non-veterinary volunteers. There are many roles on the various recommended committees that do not require veterinary experience.
3. Form your Primary Veterinary Disaster Team from the clinics and individuals that responded to the questionnaire. This group will make policy decisions, edit the enclosed supply list, and divide up organizational tasks. The Primary Veterinary Disaster Team will take the lead in an actual disaster.

- a. **Supply and Equipment Section:** this section would develop a list of supplies for hands-on animal care during an emergency that includes suppliers. The section would also make provisions for the feeding of both animals and human caretakers. A depot could be stocked with a minimum amount of supplies.

Existing facilities such as feed mills, veterinary hospitals, hardware stores, pharmaceutical distributors and poison control depots may serve as sources. Also consider unorthodox sources of supplies. For example, empty and cleaned 5 gallon buckets from local paint stores make excellent water buckets.

Useful forms and lists can be found on pages 28-31 and 72-74 along with instructions for their use. Don't forget the importance of sending out thank you letters after a response to any businesses or individuals who contributed resources or supplies to the team. This is your best means of retaining support and recruiting additional sponsors.

The supply section is also responsible for getting adequate copies of all necessary forms and storing them with other supplies. Some of the forms are designed to be printed using carbonless duplicate or triplicate for legal purposes (pages 66, 69, 70, and 78). Notations at the bottom of these forms instruct volunteers how to distribute the copies.

- b. **Transportation Section:** this section would provide for assistance to vets and animal shelters, zoos, etc., if they needed to evacuate. A list of the types of vehicles that could be used to evacuate animals and the sources of such vehicles should be prepared in advance (see page 22).

The section would also provide for shipment of animal care supplies to outlying areas and to care facilities from the central distribution location. Finally, it would procure necessary equipment for tie-down systems for trucks and trailers.

Routes for evacuation must be coordinated with the Department of Transportation and EOC. These routes should be separate, if possible, from routes used to evacuate people.

- c. **Shelter/Evacuation Site Section:** this section would attempt to secure properly constructed buildings which would agree to shelter people and their pets if County Animal Control cannot oversee it (see page 25).

- d. **Volunteer Coordinator(s):** this section is responsible for the recruitment and screening of volunteers for placement in appropriate positions. During a disaster, these coordinators are also responsible for coordinating feeding of volunteers with the Supply Section and assessing volunteer well-being. If morale seems low, organization of a stress-relieving event during a lull in relief work may be warranted. Also, Red Cross mental health workers may be requested to assist with demoralized volunteers.

Convergent volunteers, volunteers responding to media coverage of the disaster, should be

instructed to fill out volunteer applications for future disasters. It is important that these volunteers understand how valuable their help can be, but that they cannot be utilized without appropriate training and certification as Disaster Service Workers. It is very rare that any willing volunteer cannot be properly used if appropriately screened and placed.

- e. **Identification Section:** this section is responsible for arranging the necessary training and identification cards for team members in coordination with County OES. Identification procedures for animals would include development of systems for photographing and tracking animals with appropriate paperwork. And, finally, this section would also need to develop a system for photographing and recording details of dead animals.
 - f. **Communications Section:** this section would develop a plan for communication between the various animal care sites, distribution centers, County Emergency Operations Center, etc. A list of people willing to provide communication resources should be developed and periodically updated. Prior arrangements can be made with phone companies to establish open lines between the disaster team's headquarters and the EOC (see page 32).
 - g. **Animal Care Section:** this section would be responsible for training assigned volunteers to provide hands-on animal care such as exercising, grooming, sanitation of animal facilities, etc. This section should include veterinarians, veterinary technicians and other medical personnel.
 - h. **Animal Rescue Section:** this section would determine if your county plan contains provisions for the placement of search and rescue teams throughout the county. If so, this section would work to add an animal component to each of these teams. This will facilitate treatment of animals identified by human SAR teams.
4. Contact your local OES officer. Outline your goals and how you wish to assist. Discuss how (s)he would like to have members of your team identified (by ID card etc.) to allow access to disaster sites. Have volunteers sworn in as Disaster Service Workers. Work with your OES officer to draft a memorandum of understanding to formalize the cooperation between your team and the other disaster service providers. This individual will be key in developing relations and cooperation with the organizations listed below.
 5. Contact your Animal Control, Animal Regulation, HS or SPCA disaster coordinator. Decide how you can best work as a team to meet the needs of animals affected by disaster. They will welcome your support and expertise.
 6. Contact the Red Cross and Salvation Army to inform them that you are there to assist them when pet owners, affected by disaster, begin to report to their shelters with their pets.
 7. Complete the one page summary of your team members and mail to CVMA. If you practice in a state other than California, give your one page summary to your local veterinary association and your state veterinary association.
 8. Have exercises to practice your response (see page 42). The more you practice, the better your response!