



**STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM
EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION 17**

**OPERATING GUIDANCE
FOR
THE SHELTERING HOLDING PERIOD FOR CAPTURED, RESCUED OR
ABANDONED ANIMALS DURING AN EMERGENCY**

EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 2009

I. Introduction

Domestic animals are an integral part of daily life in America. Approximately 60 percent of U.S. households include dogs, cats and other species as companion animals. Service animals perform complex roles in improving the quality of life for people with various disabilities, and both police dogs and search and rescue dogs routinely save human lives. In addition to being used as resources, animals have intrinsic value. Rescuing animals from natural or human-caused disasters has both practical and moral dimensions. Any incident that poses a threat to large numbers of people is likely to put animals at risk also. The large numbers of individuals involved coupled with the logistical difficulties inherent in emergency situations makes the need for coordinated and well-planned disaster relief a considerable concern.

The welfare of animals left behind during a disaster is a planning issue that merits serious consideration. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina brought public attention to the plight of companion animals abandoned during the evacuation of the Gulf Coast. Estimates by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Animal Rescue New Orleans, and the Louisiana SPCA indicate that more than 8,500 companion animals were rescued from the Gulf Coast region. Some estimates place the number as high as 15,000 (See Bryant, S. "No Way Would We Put Them Down: Animals still Homeless after Katrina." *Houston Chronicle*. April 22, 2006; B3. Scott, RT. "Get Animals Out of Town, Too, Bill Suggests: Legislation would provide a place for pets during an evacuation." *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. April 16, 2006; P1). According to the HSUS, over 6,000 companion animals were rescued from the city of New Orleans and taken to the staging area at Lamar-Dixon in Gonzales. Only 500 were reunited with their guardians. Most were transferred to more than two hundred shelters across the country. HSUS reports that 2,385 animals were rescued in Mississippi and sheltered at the Hattiesburg staging area. One hundred twenty-six reunions took place there. Six weeks after Katrina, only 207 animals were known to have been reunited with their guardians at HSUS-run operations. By December 2005, HSUS estimated over two thousand reunions. Although the number of animals that died is unknown, estimates by the LA/SPCA place it in the thousands.

Effective evacuation of humans cannot occur without incorporating their animal companions. Saving the lives of companion animals therefore has implications for saving human lives. Research has shown, and Hurricane Katrina verified, that people are less likely to follow evacuation orders if they cannot take their animals with them. (See Heath, Beck, Kass, & Glickman. "Human and pet related

risk factors for household evacuation failure during a natural disaster.” American Journal of Epidemiology. 2001; 153:659-665).

When population evacuations are ordered by local authorities, companion animals must also leave. They can accompany guardians to temporary housing in hotels or with friends or family, or they can be sheltered in a facility designated for animals. Except for service animals, not every human shelter accepts pets. When companion animals are left behind, the separation of people from their animals produces significant anxiety and hardship. Consequently, “pet-friendly” shelters, which house people and animals in close proximity, have increased. More problems arise when animals are left behind. Reunification with guardians becomes extremely difficult, especially if the animals lack identification. People also endanger themselves and emergency personnel when they attempt to enter or reenter evacuated areas to retrieve their companion animals. (See Zayas, A. “A dog, a rescue, true devotion.” Tampa Tribune. September 6, 2009).

II. Authorities

- Chapter 252, Florida Statutes
- Pets Evacuation & Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act)
- Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act (PKEMRA)

III. Purpose

It is the purpose of this guidance to establish minimum holding periods for captured, rescued or abandoned animals in disasters. It is the recommendation of the State that any animal, other than livestock or wildlife, displaced in the impacted area be sheltered for a period of not less than 30 calendar days from the date of their capture, rescue or abandonment.

IV. Situation

- A. Florida could experience disaster conditions that would require implementation of this guidance.
- B. Some captured, rescued or abandoned animals may need to be transported to other areas for care.
- C. Many households do not provide proper identification for their pets. The lack of proper identification of animals that become separated from their owners delays the process of locating the animal’s owners. Therefore, a longer than

normal time period will enhance the possibility of reuniting owners with their pets.

V. Concept of Operations

A. General

- Step 1. Emergency animal shelter operations may go into effect when the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) activates to Level 2 or 1 operation. When activation occurs, ESF 17 shall review the inventory of pet food and critical supplies on hand and order or obtain any additional supplies necessary to assist county shelter operations. Upon the availability of pet food, supplies and equipment, ESF 17 will assist animal shelters with these resources during the period of the emergency.
- Step 2. When a storm is less than 48 hours away from landfall (based on the National Weather Service advisories) and is projected to be a major event which will impact the state, ESF 17, in consultation with the SERT Chief, will help counties coordinate the evacuation of the animals to a safe shelter. ESF 17 will monitor animal sheltering operations from the SEOC.
- Step 3. While a shelter is limited to its available resources, it should follow these policies closely if it is to be an asset to the animals and the community it serves:
 - Accept every animal, or partner with another shelter, facility or organization that can provide care.
 - Maintain a clean, safe, and healthy environment for the animals.
- Step 4. Once the storm hits and sustained winds have fallen below 50 miles per hour and conditions are safe for travel around in the impacted area, ESF 17, at the request of the county, will dispatch personnel to assess damage and operability of the local animal shelters. As needed, members of the State Agriculture Response Team (SART) will be deployed to assist with the care of captured, rescued or abandoned animals.
- Step 5. Animal shelter agencies shall continue to care for all animals in their possession. These agencies may call upon ESF 17 to assist with operations or to request pet food, supplies and equipment.
- Step 6. Any animal that is captured, rescued or abandoned should be held for a minimum of 30 calendar days at a designated animal shelter to allow evacuees time to reclaim any displaced pets. However, those

animals captured, rescued or abandoned in the impacted area at the end of the state's official "incident period" should be subject to the pre-disaster holding periods established by that county. At the end of the 30-day hold period, the animals may be released from a public shelter or its designated agent and the animals will fall under the non-emergency animal ordinances of the county. Every effort should be made to foster and/or adopt the animals. Prospective adopters should be screened using established adoption standards.

Within the 30 day hold period, those animals that are captured, rescued or abandoned and that are deemed unfit to be maintained in the shelter environment or for foster care or adoption may be released to the control of the nearest operable county animal control agency. The animals will then be held for a period of not less than 5 calendar days for further evaluation. If the animal is still deemed unfit, it will be disposed of in accordance with their ordinances. For an animal to be considered "unfit" an animal control officer, licensed veterinarian and the shelter manager must be in agreement on the determination. The 5-day hold period will be waived if an animal control officer, licensed veterinarian and the animal shelter manager determine it is in the best interest of the animal to be euthanized immediately to prevent further suffering.

Loose, wandering livestock, including equine that are a public health and safety concern should be collected and held for a minimum period of 15 days. At the end of 15 days, the animals should fall under the non-emergency animal ordinances of the county. The 15 day hold period can be waived if a licensed veterinarian and facility manager determines it is in the best interest of the animal to be euthanized immediately to prevent further suffering.

B. Record Keeping

Complete and accurate records of captured, rescued or abandoned animals in an emergency event are essential for the responsible, efficient, and legal operation of an animal shelter. A record should be prepared for every captured, rescued or abandoned animal entering a shelter, giving a full description of the animal and any information about the animal's background that is available. These records should be numbered and filed so that all staff can easily retrieve them. An animal should have the same record or tag

number throughout his or her stay at the shelter, and each animal must be clearly identified with a temporary collar and tag.

The Animal Shelter Manager or designee will be responsible for the registration of all employees and volunteers at Animal Shelter facilities, including the evacuation facility, and for the registration and record keeping for all animals at those facilities and any other documentation required by local authorities.

C. Hours of Operation

During the period of the state of emergency, a shelter should be open to the public a minimum of 5 days per week for claiming or adopting animals, including at least one weekend day. It should be open at least two evenings a week, unless evening hours of operation conflict with any local curfew. The hours of operation should be clearly posted outside the shelter and made known throughout the community.

Emergency services to receive and assist sick or injured animals may be required during disasters. If it is beyond the capability of the community to provide such services, these resources should be requested from the State.

VI. Direction and Control

During an emergency, Animal Shelter activities should be coordinated through the county ESF 17. Each local Animal Shelter Manager will be responsible for the operation of its facilities, including the evacuation facilities, during an emergency activation.

VII. Plan Development and Maintenance

The ESF 17 will assume the primary responsibility for revising and updating this guidance annually and in response to major changes in policy.