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Press Release 05-142

## Four-legged Family Members Must be Included in Emergency Plans

Concern for pets is main reason why some won't evacuate disaster areas



Okaloosa (Fla.) animal services director comforts a woman seeking a temporary home for her dog. [Credit and Larger Version](#)

August 16, 2005

Over the past several decades, household pets have come to occupy an increasingly intimate place in the modern family, gaining nearly the status of children or other loved ones. Yet, according to University of Colorado, Boulder sociologist, Leslie Irvine, caring for pet safety in a disaster has often been an afterthought.

"Almost 100 percent of people who have pets describe them as family members," said Irvine. "And all family members need to be considered in a disaster plan."

In a presentation last week at the annual meeting of the Society for Social Problems in Philadelphia, Irvine said pets and livestock are now on the radar screen when emergency teams respond to a hurricane, chemical spill or other catastrophe.

Nearly a decade ago, that was not the case. Evacuations from Hurricane Andrew left some 1,000 deserted pets to be euthanized for lack of space to care for them. In 1999, more than 3 million pets and farm animals died in the wake of Hurricane Floyd.

Irvine contrasted the loss of animals during those disasters with data she collected in Fla. last year in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley, which was rated a category 4 storm with winds up to 145 miles per hour.

She examined interagency communication, the role of volunteers, animal identification procedures, interagency communication, and how emergency



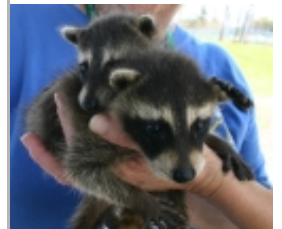
A young volunteer comforts a kitten after Hurricane Ivan.

[Credit and Larger Version](#)



A lost dog with a broken leg received treatment at a temporary animal shelter.

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A Bay Area Disaster Animal Response Team (DART) member cares for two orphaned raccoons.

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When left alone during a disaster, animals must care for each other.

[Credit and Larger Version](#)

workers provided assistance to anguished pet owners who were separated from their animals.

Her main finding: "No animal had to be euthanized due to lack of space."

Irvine also studied how human attitudes, which she calls "myths," influence emergency workers and their approach to free-roaming animals in a disaster area.

"Alongside the myths about looting and price gouging, hurricane Charley revealed the myth of what I call 'the dangerous dog pack,'" she said. Although scientific studies have not confirmed that behavior in newly displaced house pets, it "has serious implications for the treatment of animals displaced by disasters," Irvine said.

Animals may suffer when such myths pervade "Incident Command Systems"--firmly institutionalized and successful sets of procedures for managing people in a crisis. Irvine called for a re-examination and modification of emergency response plans to better reflect actual, personal experiences with animal behavior.

-NSF-

Additional information is available in the University of Colorado press release: <http://www.colorado.edu/news/>

Information on disaster preparedness for pets, horses and livestock is available through:

**The Humane Society of the United States:**

[http://www.hsus.org/hsus\\_field/hsus\\_disaster\\_center](http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center)

**The American Veterinary Medical Association:**

[http://www.avma.org/disaster/saving\\_family.asp](http://www.avma.org/disaster/saving_family.asp).

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The Code 3 Response Vehicle takes the role of an emergency veterinary hospital.

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