

## Highlights of

# The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Second Edition (2022)



## 12. Disaster response

### 12.1 General

All shelters should be prepared to respond when directly affected by a disaster. Advance planning is critical to safeguard animal welfare and to protect human health and safety during a disaster, whether due to natural events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and fires, or human-made events such as large-scale cruelty cases, workplace violence, and toxic chemical spills. Animal welfare needs described elsewhere in the Guidelines are still present even when a shelter is experiencing a disaster, and deviations from these Guidelines should be as brief and minimal as possible. Published operational guidelines for animal evacuation/transport, animal decontamination, and emergency animal sheltering may be helpful in planning for and responding to disasters. Whether impacted or offering aid, familiarity with disaster response principles is essential. Disaster response is divided into four phases: 1) Mitigation, 2) Preparedness, 3) Response, and 4) Recovery.

### 12.2 Mitigation

Shelters must identify and plan for reasonably anticipated disasters, including those most likely to occur in their geographic area. Once disaster risks are identified, mitigation strategies, such as holding community pet identification and rabies vaccination clinics and maintaining insurance and liability policies, can be developed and implemented to reduce the impact of a future disaster.

### 12.3 Preparedness

Every sheltering organization must have a written plan that outlines the actions the shelter will take in response to likely emergency scenarios. These actions may include services that the shelter does not typically provide, including admission of displaced animals, provision of resources, or relocation of animals to other facilities. Disaster response plans must detail how shelters will provide essential services to all animals currently in care, including those in foster homes. Plans should include evacuation strategies in the event that supply chains or are disrupted. Since the risk of zoonotic disease spread may increase during disasters, plans must include steps to control transmission, especially rabies, due to an increased likelihood of dog bites.

Shelter disaster plans should indicate the personnel structure necessary to provide essential animal care services during a disaster. Training is an essential part of preparedness; exercises and drills are excellent training tools and allow shelters to

evaluate how well the current plan fits the organization's needs. Provisions should be included to address the physical and mental stress experienced by personnel, community members, and responders. Shelters responding to disasters as part of a coordinated response should draft memoranda of understanding with their governmental and nongovernmental response partners.

### 12.4 Response

The most common challenge faced during a response is communication, both internally and externally. When indicated, an Incident Command System should be initiated rapidly to designate and maintain a clear chain of command and communication infrastructure (see Appendix I).

Each animal admitted during a disaster must receive at least a cursory assessment at intake to check for signs of infectious disease, any conditions that require emergency medical care, and exposure to hazards. Animals admitted during a disaster should be given core vaccines, including rabies, and parasite control (see Medical Health) and must be decontaminated when applicable; use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is recommended until decontamination is complete.

Shelters must anticipate the arrival of self-deployed volunteers during a disaster; preemptive planning for volunteer roles, training, and oversight can effectively mobilize this resource. Veterinary professionals must only provide medical treatment or services when they hold a license to practice in that jurisdiction or are exempt from that requirement. Oversight of controlled substances must remain with the individual identified as the responsible party on the DEA license for that premise. Shelters should have a system for managing physical and monetary donations and tracking resources and staff time during disaster response and recovery in order to apply for reimbursement grants from local, state, or federal agencies or private organizations.

As soon as it is safe, shelters must make concerted efforts to reunify pets displaced by a disaster. If an animal is transported out of the impacted area, clear communication between partner shelters regarding timelines for reunification efforts is important.

### 12.5 Recovery

The recovery period following a disaster lasts until the individual shelter and affected communities return to normal. Even if undamaged, shelters may be challenged by continuing impacts on their community or personnel. If damage to the shelter building, grounds, or local infrastructure is a concern, a full safety assess-

ment must be made prior to resuming normal activities. Shelters must tailor placement efforts when their community is impacted by a disaster, and they should provide additional services that

support keeping pets with their owners. Shelters should debrief and evaluate their planning, response, and recovery processes, so that adjustments to their plans can be made.

*See the full guidelines for references and supporting documents:  
<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/issue/view/2>*