



Disaster Planning

Profile

THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES™

Profile:

The Humane Society of the United States’ Disaster Services Program

- *“To promote the safety and well-being of all animals who are or may be adversely affected during a disaster.*
- *To respond to the needs of those who provide emergency and supportive care to animals during all phases of a disaster.*
- *To promote the inclusion of the animal component in all federal, state, and local government disaster plans, and those developed by the general public, by engaging in an ongoing process of proactive education and mutual awareness of the needs of animals in disasters.*
- *To encourage cooperation with other animal protection organizations, veterinary associations, disaster relief agencies, and government officials.”*

—The Humane Society of the United States’ (HSUS)
Mission Statement for Disaster Services



The HSUS has responded to disasters throughout its history. However, in 1992, its efforts culminated into the development of the Disaster Services Program after Hurricane Andrew devastated a 20-by-50-square-mile area south of Miami. At that time, HSUS staff joined local animal groups in establishing the first-ever temporary pet shelter/veterinary MASH unit, a model that has been used in disasters affecting animals ever since.

The HSUS Disaster Services Program works on three levels: Preparedness, Awareness, and Response. The number and severity of disasters appear to be increasing and having a major impact on all types of animals and their owners, primarily because of a lack of comprehensive and coordinated planning. Through the years, The HSUS has determined its efforts should go beyond assisting animals already impacted by disasters. A major focus should be on the development of proactive animal disaster plans on local, state, and national levels.

To that end, The HSUS serves as a resource for individuals, animal-related organizations, government officials, and others concerned about the needs of animals before, during, and after a disaster. On the national level, The HSUS has a statement of understanding with the American Red Cross, and is partnered with

the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in “Project Impact,” which is striving to make communities across the country disaster-resistant through public and private partnerships.

In March 2000, The HSUS co-sponsored the National Animal Disaster Conference (NADC) with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Division of Emergency Management, and the United States Department of Agriculture. The three-day conference focused on a variety of issues relating to disaster planning for animals. Three hundred people from 36 states and Canada attended the conference. The HSUS intends to continue its sponsorship of the NADC as it is held in other parts of the country.

To increase awareness of the animal disaster issue, The HSUS has extensive outreach programs to educate the public about preparing themselves and their animals for potential disasters. One is a pilot program with Wal-Mart, which originally placed companion animal disaster preparedness materials and displays in many of its stores in Florida. The program has now been offered to Wal-Mart stores nationwide.

The HSUS also recognizes that many areas do not have animal disaster plans in place, and



HSUS

those that do can sometimes be quickly overwhelmed in major events. With nine regional offices and a full-time response team, The HSUS can provide local authorities with the expertise and leadership necessary to coordinate animal response activities in the event of a disaster, including animal rescue, provision of supplies, some financial assistance, and the set-up of temporary animal compounds as needed. For example, The HSUS received the “1997 Volunteer Organization of the Year” award from the state of Minnesota for its Red River Flood response, serves as lead coordinating agency for companion animal issues during disasters in Florida, and coordinated companion animal efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd in North Carolina in 1999.

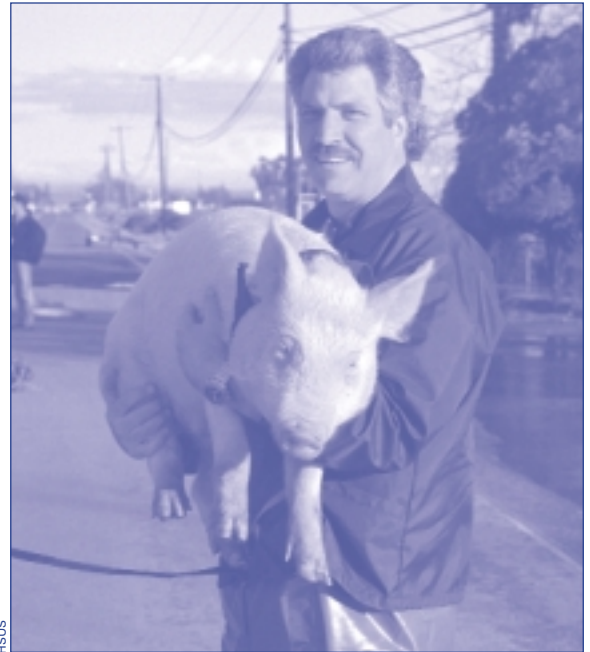
The HSUS’ Mission Statement for its disaster program is far reaching in scope. Why?

We want to be proactive and focus our efforts on preparing every animal owner, community, and state to plan ahead and take care of the animals in their charge. While we do respond to assist animals affected by disasters and can bring in tremendous resources of supplies, manpower, and expertise, we do not want to lose sight of the big picture. In any given disaster there are animals who suffer and die before anyone can arrive to attempt a rescue.

It is imperative that those closest to those animals—their owners or community members—have plans in place long before disaster strikes to avoid or minimize danger to people and animals.

Many disasters affect huge areas, so there are simply not enough trained rescue personnel in any national group to cover the entire impacted area.

During Hurricane Floyd, for instance, more than 60 counties in North Carolina experienced major flooding. National resources poured into



that state, and it was not sufficient for the magnitude and urgency of the situation. At the same time, New Jersey experienced severe flooding in several counties, but the only assistance for animals was provided by local resources, if at all. It is The HSUS’ goal to have communities and states prepared to take care of their own animals in an emergency. They should not be dependent on outside groups for animal relief efforts. Groups offering assistance from outside of the area should be supplementing already existing animal plans and efforts.

Almost every day emergencies take place that don’t make the state or national news. Some of those relatively small disasters can have a tremendous impact on animals, threatening their lives as seriously as if they were in a major disaster. Having local animal plans and response teams ensures all animals have a chance to survive.

How does HSUS get its message to the local and state levels?

Our nine regional offices are already active in developing state plans all over the country. We are pioneering the development of state Animal Disaster Planning Advisory Committees (ADPACs). These committees are comprised of organizations and individuals interested in



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promoting the effective development and implementation of disaster plans to protect animals. They work within county and state emergency management systems to integrate the preparedness and response plans for humans and animals.

By attending and speaking at emergency management conferences, we share our knowledge and expertise directly with those who already have disaster plans in place. We can show them why it is to their benefit to have an animal component in those plans. There is a growing awareness and interest in animal issues among emergency managers.

We are also developing training materials to help communities, animal facilities, and the general public to prepare for disasters. If animal owners plan ahead, there will be fewer animals to rescue in the aftermath of a disaster. All animal facilities (such as shelters, veterinary offices, pet stores, stables, and kennels) need to have a plan so their animals survive, and so they can assist the overall animal disaster effort. The community plan should bring everyone with an interest in protecting animals together so that a coordinated response can be made to handle animal issues that arise. Sometimes these groups (such as humane societies, veterinarians, animal control agencies, dog and cat breeders, cattlemen and other agricultural interests, zoos, etc.) have differing

everyday concerns and views. However, all should agree to the goal of helping animals survive in the aftermath of a disaster.

The HSUS has also co-sponsored the development of a pilot program in Florida called DART (Disaster Animal Response Team). The goal of the 20-hour intensive course is to have local animal teams trained specifically for disaster response work within the local emergency system. DART is recognized by the state of Florida as its primary animal response unit. We are now exploring how to take such a program nationwide.

Is The HSUS making any progress with these efforts?

Absolutely. Disaster plans for animals are being developed across the country. In Florida, local animal disaster plans have kicked into action during major threats such as the 1998 wildfires and Hurricane Floyd.

Organized animal groups in counties have staffed their local emergency operations centers, opened pet friendly evacuation shelters, moved horses and livestock out of danger, battened down animal shelters, and acted as part of their emergency management's damage assessment team to determine the animal impact in their area and conduct rescues. The HSUS works with the Florida Department of Agriculture (which is the lead agency in the state for animal issues) tracking animal activities, directing the movement of DART teams into impacted areas and the evacuation of animals to safe areas, and coordinating incoming supplies and donations.

The HSUS will continue to empower individuals, communities, and states to develop animal disaster plans that work for them. Every state and community is different, and plans will reflect those differences, but the result can and should be the same: survival of animals and their owners in disasters large or small.

Promoting
the protection
of all animals

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
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