



Animal Management during Emergencies & Disasters

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Everyone knows how important it is to have local emergency and disaster management plans. Yet often, the need to care for livestock and family pets during emergencies is overlooked. The Animal Issues Committee (AIC) of the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) has written a new guideline to help local authorities include this critical need in their emergency management plans. The guideline was approved by the Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM) in the spring of 2005.

The information below explains how local jurisdictions can incorporate animal issues into their emergency management plans. It explains what local plans should include, what role county Extension agents can play, and how animal management plans can best be used.

Local Emergency Management and the AIC Plan

The Texas guide for local emergency management planning was approved in January 2004. It helps local authorities determine ahead of time what they will do when disaster strikes. (The plan can be found at ftp://ftp.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/plans/dem_10.pdf).

One requirement is that each county designate at least one individual as the local Emergency Man-

agement Coordinator (EMC). This person works with the mayor and/or the county judge, who may request assistance from the state (the GDEM) if a situation is too large or overwhelming for the local jurisdiction to handle. The EMC works with others at the local level to address issues unique to that city and/or county and determine what should be done before, during and after a disaster.

Although the state law required counties to have up-to-date emergency management plans for addressing potential hazards, protecting citizens, and assisting in the recovery process, nothing was included in the state guide about managing animals (livestock or pets). This could include the need to rescue or apprehend stray animals, provide shelter for animals, quarantine animals that may



Stray animals are rescued from a flooded area after a hurricane.

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Cattle carcasses infected with a foreign animal disease are being transported for disposal after an outbreak.

be diseased, dispose of animal carcasses (diseased or nondiseased), and provide medical help for sick and injured animals. The AIC plan (available at ftp://ftp.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/plans/n_appendix_4_0804.rtf or http://www.tahc.state.tx.us/emergency/Animal_Issues_Committee_Plan.pdf) was added to the state guideline to encourage local communities to plan appropriately for managing animals during disasters such as animal disease outbreaks, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and fires, as well as terrorism and bioterrorism.

Each county is to have a committee to help develop the local animal management plan. Committee members might include county Extension agents, veterinarians, veterinary technicians, agricultural science teachers, animal control officers and others who will contribute knowledge and experience to the group. These individuals are to be contacted and asked to serve. The Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) and the TAHC are identifying private veterinarians to participate on animal issues committees so that at least one veterinarian in each county is a contact person. The local animal issues committee will advise the EMC, help anticipate problems, and develop action plans for dealing with disasters, whether they are natural, accidental or intentional.



Each county will form an animal issues committee to design and test an emergency management plan.

The Role of the County Extension Agent (CEA)

As county Extension agents, you can help get local animal issues committees up and running by contacting your local EMCs and expressing interest in starting a committee to address the AIC plan. To locate your local EMC, contact either your RPD or DEA. The chair of the committee may be appointed by a county or city official, and you can volunteer to assume that position, although it isn't necessary for you to chair the committee just because you initiate its formation.

The EMC may appreciate your help in recruiting committee members. The EMC or the TAHC representative in your county can provide the name of the veterinarian who will serve. Once the group has been formed, it is time to address the plan.

Developing a Plan

The AIC plan is a set of guidelines that will help in preparing your own local plan. It is only a guide. The local animal issues committee is the "expert" group that should advise government authorities on how best to handle various disaster situations.

It is important to distinguish between outbreaks of a foreign animal disease and other disasters. If the USDA and/or the TAHC diagnoses a foreign animal disease, those agencies are in control and will direct the response, with the local animal issues committee providing support for the animal health authorities on the scene. However, if there is a disaster other than disease, local authorities are in control and direct the response, with animal health authorities providing support and advice as needed.

When writing a county animal management plan, consider all natural disasters (disease outbreaks, floods, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, winter storms, droughts, etc.) and human-caused disasters (traffic, terrorism and bioterrorism, power outages, explosions, hazardous material spills, etc.) and how best to handle each situation. Be realistic and develop scenarios that are true to your area. Then answer these questions:

- Whom do we contact in an emergency?
- If an evacuation is warranted, where do we move the animals?
- Will a search and rescue be necessary?
- Do certain animals need to be captured and held for evaluation?



This dog was abandoned after a tornado.



These pig carcasses are awaiting disposal.

- Do the animals need to be identified so they can be reunited with their owners?
- Are the animals going to need shelter? If so, where will it be?
- Who is going to feed the animals?
- By whom and how will the animals be transported?
- Who (veterinarians, animal health technicians, others) will provide medical assistance if it is needed?
- Who will determine if an animal has become sick, been injured or died from a disease or toxic situation? Who will diagnose the disease or toxin?
- How will the disease be controlled?
- What is the proper disposal method for animal carcasses (diseased and nondiseased); how will that process occur; can the carcasses be moved; and where is the appropriate disposal location(s)?



Animal shelters will be needed to house companion animals and livestock.



These cattle died from anthrax. The local emergency management plan must cover proper carcass disposal so as not to spread the disease.

These are just some of the questions to be discussed when developing the plans for your particular cities and the county. The committee should identify individuals who can help with these situations should the need arise. For instance, if animals need to be evacuated for any reason, you must know 1) who will transport the animals, 2) where the animals will be taken, and 3) who will care for the animals. If someone in your community transports cattle for a living, he would be a logical person to ask for assistance. If he agrees, he would be the one called in an emergency and would be in charge of moving the animals immediately.

The problem of where to house evacuated animals could be solved by lining up several people who agree to shelter animals on their own properties and care for them during emergencies. The phone numbers of these individuals should be kept handy so they can be reached day or night, weekends and holidays.

The committee should develop a list of all such individuals who have agreed to be at the committee's disposal. The individuals should be contacted periodically to ensure that they are still willing to participate.

It is a good idea for the local animal issues committee to hold exercises to test how the plan will work. The old phrase "Practice Makes Perfect" holds true here. The more comfortable individuals are with the plan, the more smoothly it will be carried out if a disaster occurs. During these exercises, committee members will see their plan in action and can decide how best to communicate with one another.

To ensure that operations run smoothly, the committee should prepare situation reports. There is a template for this in the AIC plan; or, one can be developed locally. These reports are useful during exercises and actual disasters because they help the committee

keep track of what is going on. The committee is also asked to keep activity logs. These logs will contain the disaster scenarios (either exercises or real) and might outline what the committee considered doing in each situation and the action it took. Activity logs also help the group critique its actions and be better prepared for emergencies. Activity logs should be kept on all issues discussed, and they should be accessible in case they are ever needed. This should all be addressed in the plan.



Exercises should be held to practice implementing the disaster plan.

The local EMC may at times call a meeting of all the people involved in carrying out the emergency management plan. It is important that at least one member of the animal issues committee be present at these meetings to provide information if animal issues are discussed.

Preparing a specific animal emergency plan for the community or county is very important. Just remember to:

- List everything that must be done, and every person who must be contacted from the first individual to contact to the individual with a backhoe (if carcasses need to be buried).
- Use the AIC plan only as a guide. Be creative!
- Don't leave out details. When an actual disaster occurs it is too late to look for solutions.
- Hold regular exercises to be sure the plan will operate smoothly and is effective.
- Communicate.
- Keep situation reports and activity logs of past scenarios. You never know when they might provide critical information.

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