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People Evacuate New Orleans With Their Pets

By Steve Dale

In the intervening years since Hurricane Katrina, the Government began to shore up the levee system surrounding New Orleans, while the Louisiana State Animal Response Team began to shore up holes in the previous evacuation procedures, and enlisted American Humane Association and others for advice.

This past September as Hurricane Gustav approached, residents with pets who couldn't find refuge at pet friendly relatives, friends, hotels or motels had another option.

At various staging stations around New Orleans, people showed up to evacuate with critters, registering themselves and their pets. Then folks headed for Shreveport on busses with cats, very small dogs, and assorted other small pets on laps (in carrying cases). Larger dogs and exotic' pets, such as snakes, were placed in crates (available free) on air-conditioned refrigerator trucks. Deborah Schnackenberg, senior director animal emergency services at the American Humane Association, and American Humane's Red Star Animal Emergency Services Team, met with other animal welfare organizations in this collaborative effort in Shreveport.

American Humane's Diane Robinson at Megashelter in Shreveport

The plan, which mostly worked, was for all to caravan together so pets and people arrived at the same place at the same time

"I can honestly say it's heartwarming to see these people reunited with their animals," says Joellen Cimino, director of Animal Health Services for Noah's Wish. "I can tell you that I was told numerous times, 'thank goodness you have provided a way out and a shelter where I can have my pets on site, otherwise I wouldn't have left New Orleans."

The phenomenon of people refusing to evacuate without their animals even received attention from FEMA Director R. David Paulison, who briefed reporters during the crisis aboard Air Force One.

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FROM THE AVMA

Taking Pets On The Road

Traveling with your pet has never been more popular. For example, lots of resorts now offer programs to pamper your pooch or kitty—from dog massage to cat cuisine. But there are some challenges to traveling with your pet—particularly keeping the animal safe and healthy.

Here are some travel tips from the AVMA:

• Be sure your pet is wearing a tag which includes your cell phone number, land line, as well as email address.

• Microchip identification is the best way to ensure being reunited with your pet if the animal becomes lost on the road. Be sure your registry information with the microchip company is up to date.

• In cars, keep your cat safe in a pet crate to prevent a kitty under the gas or brake pedal. Use a dog travel harness to attach your pup to a seatbelt. Never drive with an animal in your lap, and never allow a dog to hang his head out an open window.

• For air travel, most airlines require a veterinary pet health certificate issued within 10 days of your trip. If your pet is traveling in cargo, there may be additional restrictions. One concern is exposing animals to temperatures less than 45 degrees F (without an acclimation certificate from your veterinarian), or more than 85 degrees F for more than 45 minutes.

Learn more at www.avma.org.

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People Evacuate With Their Pets *(cont'd)*

American Humane's Big Rig is staged for disasters

He said, "Remember during Katrina, people wouldn't leave their homes because they didn't want to leave their pets, and shelters wouldn't take pets. So we opened pet shelters."

Approximately, 1,600 people found a safe haven at the Hirsch Coliseum at the State Fairgrounds in Shreveport. Across the way, within easy access, just over one thousand animals were housed in a large livestock barn.

Schnackenberg says there's no comparing this organized effort to the chaos that ensued during Hurricane Katrina. "This is absolutely better," she says.

Clearly, the main intent is to motivate residents, who otherwise wouldn't leave the city, to evacuate. It turned out that another somewhat unexpected benefit was simply having the animals around.

"Walking dogs, talking to and petting the cats – definitely a stress reducer," says Schnackenberg. She says there's a palpable difference in the general atmosphere between shelters which don't allow animals, and those that do allow easy access to pets. "Oh my gosh, the stress level is off the map at places which don't allow the pets. But then when the pets are around something magical happens, improving the ability to cope."

Anthropomorphism?

By Scott Vande Griend, DVM

Today, dogs (and cats- thankfully!) have migrated from the "back 40" through the "backyard" and into our bedrooms! As dogs (and cats) have played a more prominent role in our lives, we pet lovers have gradually anthropomorphized them. "Anthropomorphism" means ascribing human characteristics to animals. For example, many people dress their pets in human T-shirts or hats, particularly for Halloween.

According to the most recent American Veterinary Medical Association U.S. Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook, about 98 percent of pet owners consider their pets beloved companions or equal family members. Only the remaining two percent consider their pets' property. Increasingly, dogs and cats are solely on their property, at least far more than in the 1960's. Today, most 20 year olds may not even know what a dog house is. This proximity has also allowed veterinarians to more closely observe medical problems and illness.

Anthropomorphism can be cute and is quite harmless, but it can be dangerous when pets are fed like people. I know someone who used to give his little poodle one egg a day. To a 10-pound poodle that would be like you or I eating a dozen and a half eggs. In addition, some well meaning people mistakenly give their "small persons" human medication. This may be very dangerous to pets. For example, Tylenol can kill pets.

My advice: Love your pets like family members, but treat them like the lovable unique animals they are. Always consult your veterinarian for appropriate medications and feeding practices.