

# Emergency Preparedness: Background Information

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## Emergency Preparedness

Emergency Preparedness may be defined as having a firm evacuation plan in case of emergency for all members of the household, including pets. In the case of animal welfare organizations, preparedness means having emergency evacuation plans for their sheltered residents, in case of emergency. An emergency necessitating evacuation of both people and pets may include floods, fires, chemical spills and industrial accidents, gas leaks, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc. The American Red Cross calls preparedness “an everyday task for everyday life.”

## Historic roots:

The concept of emergency preparedness is not a new one. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which responds to disasters and provides assistance all over the country, can trace its beginnings to the nation’s first piece of disaster legislation; the Congressional Act of 1803. This act provided assistance to a New Hampshire town following an extensive fire. In the century that followed, ad hoc legislation was passed more than 100 times in response to hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters. (FEMA)

By the 1930s, when the federal approach to problems became popular, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was given authority to make disaster loans for repair and reconstruction of certain public facilities following an earthquake, and later, other types of disasters.. The Flood Control Act, which gave the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers greater authority to implement flood control projects, was passed in 1934. This piecemeal approach to disaster assistance was problematic and it prompted legislation that required greater cooperation between federal agencies and authorized the President to coordinate these activities.

The 1960s and early 1970s brought massive disasters requiring major federal response and recovery operations by the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration, established within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Hurricane Carla struck in 1962, Hurricane Betsy in 1965, Hurricane Camille in 1969 and Hurricane Agnes in 1972. The Alaskan Earthquake hit in 1964 and the San Fernando Earthquake rocked Southern California in 1971. These events served to focus attention on the issue of natural disasters and brought about increased legislation. In 1968, the National Flood Insurance Act offered



new flood protection to homeowners, and in 1974 the Disaster Relief Act firmly established the process of Presidential disaster declarations.

However, emergency and disaster activities were still fragmented. At one point, more than 100 federal agencies were involved in some aspect of disasters, hazards and emergencies. Because of the duplication of efforts at the state and local level, which compounded the complexity of federal disaster relief efforts, the National Governor's Association sought to decrease the many agencies with which state and local governments were forced work. They asked President Jimmy Carter to centralize federal emergency functions.

### **Executive Order 12127**

President Carter's 1979 executive order merged many of the separate disaster-related responsibilities into the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

John Macy was named as FEMA's first director. Macy emphasized the similarities between natural hazards preparedness and the civil defense activities. FEMA began development of an Integrated Emergency Management System with an all-hazards approach that included "direction, control and warning systems which are common to the full range of emergencies from small isolated events to the ultimate emergency - war."

The new agency was faced with many challenges in its first few years that emphasized how complex emergency management can be. Early disasters and emergencies included the contamination of Love Canal, the Cuban refugee crisis and the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant. The Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989 and Hurricane Andrew in 1992 focused major national attention on FEMA. In 1993, President Clinton nominated James L. Witt as the new FEMA director. Witt became the first agency director with experience as a state emergency manager. He initiated sweeping reforms that streamlined disaster relief and recovery operations, insisted on a new emphasis regarding preparedness and mitigation, and focused agency employees on customer service. The end of the Cold War also allowed Witt to redirect more of FEMA's limited resources from civil defense into disaster relief, recovery and mitigation programs.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FEMA>

In 2001, President George W. Bush appointed Joe M. Allbaugh as the director of FEMA. Within months, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11th focused the agency on issues of national preparedness and homeland security, and tested the agency in unprecedented ways. The agency coordinated its activities with the newly formed Office of Homeland Security, and FEMA's Office of National Preparedness was given responsibility for helping to ensure that the nation's first responders were trained and equipped to deal with weapons of mass destruction. (FEMA)



## Importance:

The importance of the existence of groups like FEMA, who train and organize rescue efforts and assist with the aftermath of disasters cannot be understated. Nor can the role of organizations like the American Red Cross, which not only provide relief, but invaluable training in preparation for dealing with impending disasters.

In 2005, the aftermath of hurricane Katrina brought into clear focus the need for including our pets in our disaster planning and recovery efforts. Many people would not evacuate without their animals and who were not welcome in evacuation shelters. Rescue efforts were further thwarted when the Coast Guard, National Guard and other rescue organizations would not evacuate pets along with their owners.

Animal welfare and rescue organizations along with individuals from across the country mobilized to rescue and care for the animals that were left behind in the storm and flood devastated zone. Temporary shelters were set up in several locations at which animals were given medical care, baths and food. Animals' data were entered into a tracking system and they were then sent out of the area into a foster care network until their owners were able to claim them. Corporations and individuals offered all modes of transportation from vans to private jets to transport animals to safety.

Based on the lessons learned from hurricane Katrina, and subsequently Rita, federal legislation requiring that communities seeking funds from FEMA for disaster preparedness must include provisions for family pets and service animals in their plans for evacuation and sheltering evacuees was passed. The legislation is the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act—PETS Act. The law also authorizes FEMA to provide additional money to create pet-friendly shelters and provide special assistance to pet owners (Zawistowski 2008).

In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and then the destruction of hurricane Rita scarcely one month later in the Gulf Coast region, many states formed State Animal Response Teams (SARTs). "SARTs are interagency state organizations dedicated to preparing, planning, responding and recovering during animal emergencies in the United States. SART is a public private partnership, joining government agencies with the private concerns around the common goal of animal issues during disasters. SART programs train participants to facilitate a safe, environmentally sound and efficient response to animal emergencies on the local, county, state and federal level. The teams are organized under the auspices of state and local emergency management utilizing the principles of the Incident Command System (ICS)". (<http://www.sartusa.org/>)

Many communities formed Community Animal Response Teams (CARTs) so that local residents can receive ongoing training in animal rescue and have a say in the response to



disasters in their neighborhoods. Between statewide teams, the grassroots development of community teams and the passage of the Pet Evacuation Bill, including pets and service animals in emergency planning and preparation is now not only doable, but mandated by federal law.

### **Ties to Philanthropic Sector:**

A quick glance at the pages of Guidestar, a resource for hundreds of thousands of donors and charitable organizations, yields over 18,000 registered nonprofits whose mission is to provide disaster and emergency response. From the American Red Cross, to Habitat for Humanity to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, to local Community Animal Response Teams, there is much opportunity for lessons and engagement with the philanthropic community.

### **Key Related Ideas**

**Emergency Management** can be summed up as the practice of dealing with and avoiding risk. It involves preparing for disaster before it happens, disaster response such as emergency evacuation, quarantines, mass decontamination as well as supporting, and rebuilding communities after a disaster has occurred

**Family Emergency Preparedness** [aspcaeducation.org](http://aspcaeducation.org) preparing for emergencies should be part of every family's routine. Creating a written family plan and including the pets is an essential part of successful smooth evacuation if needed.

**Human Animal Bond** the mutually beneficial bond between animals and people and society as a whole. Rarely has the human/animal bond been as on display as during Hurricane Katrina—some people simply refused to evacuate their homes without their pets, and paid dearly. Human lives were lost in the floods because of the strength of that bond.

### **Important People Related to This Topic**

**President Carter**- his 1979 executive order merged many of the separate disaster-related responsibilities into the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

**John Macy** was named as FEMA's first director. Macy emphasized the similarities between natural hazards preparedness and the civil defense activities.

**George W. Bush**, signed the PETS Act in to federal law

**Rep. Tom Lantos**, a California Democrat, who introduced the PETS Act after seeing TV coverage of a young boy being separated from his dog after Katrina. "This country needs the force of federal law to protect people in large-scale emergencies who own household pets or



service animals such as guide dogs." Kimberly Geiger, Chronicle Washington Bureau (SF Chronicle)

Tuesday, October 10, 2006

Tiffany Mahaffy Disaster Preparedness Manager, the ASPCA

### Related Nonprofit Organizations

The American Red Cross [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

FEMA [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

[http://www.aspca.org/site/PageServer?  
pagename=pets\\_emergency](http://www.aspca.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pets_emergency)

**United Animal Nations.** Through its volunteer-driven Emergency Animal Rescue Service (EARS), UAN shelters and cares for animals displaced by natural disasters and other crises, such as criminal seizures and hoarding cases, in the United States and Canada. [www.uan.org](http://www.uan.org)

### Bibliography:

Zawistowski, Stephen. *Companion Animals in Society*. Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning. 2008.

