

EMERGENCY ANIMAL MANAGEMENT DURING DISASTERS

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Natural disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires continue to demonstrate 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 Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) wrote an Animal Issues Committee (AIC) Plan, a 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).

Through Emergency Management during Animal Disasters, Texas Cooperative Extension explains how local jurisdictions can incorporate animal issues into their emergency management plans. This publication covers what local plans should include, what roles county Extension agents and the county AIC 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 2015 and updated in 2020. It helps local authorities determine ahead of time what they will do when disaster strikes. (The plan can be found at: <https://www.tdem.texas.gov/preparedness/local-planning>.)

One requirement is that each county designate at least one individual as the local Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC). This person works with the mayor and/or the county judge, who may request assistance from the state through the GDEM if a situation is too much 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.

The 2004 state guideline required counties to have updated emergency management plans for addressing potential hazards, protecting citizens and assisting in



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

the recovery process. However, it had no provisions for managing livestock or pets. The guideline did not address such issues as the need to rescue or apprehend stray animals, provide shelter for animals, quarantine those that might be diseased, dispose of (diseased or non-diseased) carcasses, and provide medical help for sick and injured animals.

The AIC Plan was added as an appendix to the Local Emergency Management Plan to guide counties in planning appropriately for managing animals during disasters. It addresses, for example, animal disease outbreaks, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and fires, as well as terrorism and bioterrorism activities. A copy of the AIC Plan can be found at the following site: <https://www.tahc.texas.gov/emergency/pdf/AnimalIssuesCommitteeGuidance.pdf>.

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 any others who can contribute knowledge and experience to the group. The Texas Veterinary Medical Association is identifying private veterinarians to participate in disaster preparedness and

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who can be contacted to serve on county Animal Issues Committees so that at least one veterinarian in each county is a contact person. The AIC will advise the EMC, help anticipate problems, and develop action plans for dealing with natural, accidental or intentional disasters.

THE ROLE OF THE COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT (CEA)

County Extension agents can help get county AICs under way by notifying their local EMCs about wanting to start a committee to develop a plan. They can find the EMC through their Regional Program Director or the District Extension Administrator. A county or city official may appoint the committee chair, and, while the CEA can volunteer for that position, it is not necessary just because the agent initiated the group's formation.

The EMC may appreciate the agent's help in recruiting committee members. The EMC, CEA, and Extension Veterinary Medicine Unit have the list of the private veterinarians by county for contacting to serve on the committee. Once the group has been established, it is time to address the plan.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

The county Animal Issues Committee uses the AIC plan as a guide in developing its own procedures for responding to various disasters. Before writing the plan, the committee should start by discussing and making a list of the different types of disasters that might affect the county. Members will need to address all natural, accidental and intentional disease issues as well as the non-disease issues that might occur in their area.

It is important for them to distinguish between outbreaks of a foreign (or regulatory) animal disease and other disasters. If the U.S. Department of Agriculture and/or the TAHC diagnose a foreign animal disease, those agencies are in control and will direct the response. The role of the county AIC is to provide support for the animal health authorities on the scene. However, if there is a non-disease related disaster, local authorities will be in control and will provide the planned response. State and federal animal health authorities, in turn, will provide the AIC support.

Once the county AIC has addressed the different types of disasters, it is important for the committee to identify and divide the types of animals in the county into three categories:

- ▶ Livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats, and swine)
- ▶ Companion animal (e.g., dogs, cats, horses, pocket pets, and caged birds)
- ▶ Wildlife (e.g., deer and feral swine)

This is an ideal point at which to divide the AIC into three sections. Each one can take a category of animals, developing local plans for their assigned group in the event of non-disease and disease emergencies to then merge into a single plan.

The committee needs to follow the State of Texas Animal Care in Emergencies (ACE) Plan, which is pending approval, when addressing non-disease emergencies for livestock, companion animal and wildlife in the county. These situations can range from such disasters as hurricanes, floods, fires and chemical spills.

When writing a plan to address non-disease emergencies, the committee needs to consider such areas as the following:



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



This dog was abandoned after a tornado.



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

- ▶ Establishing the operations and communications system for the local Incident Command Post (ICP) for animal non-disease response activities.
- ▶ Establishing a phone bank to respond to calls from the public.
- ▶ Establishing a process for handling offers of assistance from the public (donations and volunteers).
- ▶ Developing appropriate procedures for responding to requests for help in sheltering, feeding, rescuing animals, and repairing such areas as animal enclosures.
- ▶ Providing administrative and logistical support for animal-related emergencies or disasters (an overturned livestock truck or a hazardous materials accident nearby animals).
- ▶ Developing county profiles (including location, types, sizes and other agricultural demographics) of animal-related production, processing, marketing and carcass disposal facilities/operations.
- ▶ Disseminating public information regarding animal-related issues.
- ▶ Evacuating and transporting animals from actual or impending disaster locations.
- ▶ Sheltering and caring for animals in holding facilities or other types of animal shelters (ones that are pet friendly, established or temporary) during and after emergencies and disasters.
- ▶ Defining search and rescue capabilities of teams.
- ▶ Capturing and holding of stray or lost animals affected by a disaster.
- ▶ Planning for animal identification and relocation activities.
- ▶ Providing medical care or humane euthanasia for animals injured in an emergency or disaster.
- ▶ Handling wildlife nuisance situations.

- ▶ Examining local economic impact issues.
- ▶ Reporting animal-related damage assessment information to the animal issues representative in the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

In disease-related emergencies, the AIC should follow the State of Texas Foreign and Emerging Animal Disease Response Plan for livestock, companion animals and wildlife in the county. The local plan that addresses these emergencies will cover numerous issues that are also in the non-disease plan, will tackle others that are unique to disease-related issues and will provide key support to a state or deferral ICP for any regulatory disease situation. With a disease-related issue that is either considered a foreign animal disease or is a regulatory disease, the state and federal agencies will have the lead roles and will activate parts of the county AIC plan as they are needed.



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

The following lists some ideas to consider when writing the disease portion of the plan:

- ▶ Obtaining an appropriate facility and equipment (telephones, phone lines, and high-speed internet lines and connections) for a state/federal ICP.
- ▶ Establishing a phone bank to respond to calls from the public.
- ▶ Establishing a process for handling offers of assistance from the public (donations and volunteers).
- ▶ Developing appropriate procedures for responding to requests for help in sheltering, feeding and rescuing animals, and repairing such areas as animal enclosures.
- ▶ Providing administrative and logistical support for animal disease response and eradication activities.
- ▶ Developing county profiles (including location, types,

sizes and other agricultural demographics) of animal-related production, processing, marketing and carcass disposal facilities/operations.

- ▶ Supporting the procurement of appropriate equipment, chemicals and drugs for disease control and eradication operations.
- ▶ Identifying an appropriate labor force pool. Disseminating public information.
- ▶ Responding to zoonotic public health issues (rabies vaccinations and West Nile virus prevention).
- ▶ Helping to eradicate disease through cleaning and disinfection activities.
- ▶ Supporting traffic control activities, including traffic flow within and nearby the quarantine area, and setting up signage and traffic barriers.
- ▶ Obtaining appropriate equipment and vehicles for transportation of diseased animals and animal products from one location to another for slaughter and/or disposal.
- ▶ Determining the number and location of appropriate disposal sites in the local area that could be used in an emergency to dispose of diseased carcasses while minimizing the spread of the disease.
- ▶ Establishing and operating inspection, cleaning and disinfection stations.
- ▶ Supporting depopulation and indemnification issues.
- ▶ Determining vector and scavenger control activities.
- ▶ Defining local economic impact issues.

The issue of carcass disposal impacts communities in disease and non-disease emergencies. Plans for both situations must address supporting quarantining and containment activities (determining the number and location of appropriate local disposal sites that help with emergency disposal of diseased carcasses) to keep disease from spreading. The county AIC will have to work with the different state agencies to determine these methods, identify the resources and define the process. There are several laws that govern carcass disposal methods that specify how the disposal will occur, if the animal can be moved and if there is a certain location that will be more suitable for disposal.

Once the county AIC plan is completed, some counties will then organize a County Animal Resource Team (CART) to handle animal-related disasters that deal primarily with non-disease emergency situations. It serves as an additional response team by identifying financial and physical resources to help with disasters. While each county will not have a CART, certain counties may have more than one, and they all must coordinate with the Texas State Animal Resource Team Program.



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

Since each CART needs to identify ways that it can support the AIC plan, it might use the following questions as a guide:

- ▶ Whom do you contact in case of an emergency?
- ▶ Is a search and rescue operation necessary? If so, which individuals will handle it? Are they appropriately trained and certified? Do they have the appropriate equipment (catch poles and gloves)? How will rescuers be authorized to enter restricted areas?
- ▶ Do certain animals need to be captured and held for evaluation?
- ▶ Which individuals (veterinarians and animal health technicians) will provide medical assistance?
- ▶ Who will triage injured or sick animals?
- ▶ Who will determine if sick, injured or dead animals were affected by a particular disease or a toxic substance? Who will diagnose that disease and/or toxin?
- ▶ How will the disease be controlled and eradicated?

In many non-disease situations, a shelter needs to be established to house animals that are evacuated or that require protection from the weather. During evacuations, all types of animals might be temporarily relocated to an area until it is safe for them to return home after a disaster. These are some questions that the AIC plan might need to address:

- ▶ Is there an appropriate animal representative on the local EOC to work with shelters and other facilities?
- ▶ Does the disaster or emergency warrant an evacuation? If so, where will the animals be moved?
- ▶ Do the animals need to be identified, tagged and photographed in order to be reunited with their owners?
- ▶ How will that be done? Is the appropriate equipment available (cameras and ID micro-chips)?

- ▶ Are the animals going to need sheltering? If so, what type of sheltering will they require (pet friendly shelters when their owners are in facilities in another location)? Are the shelters designated and can they accommodate small, mixed and/or large animals?
- ▶ Who is going to feed and care for the animals? Are there sufficient personnel for 24-hour operations?
- ▶ Is the shelter(s) appropriately equipped to support the animals and personnel (animal cages, animal runs, water and food bowls, cleaning supplies, running water, electricity, heat and/or air conditioning, cooking facilities, porta potties, and showers)?
- ▶ Have specific rules/procedures been established for each shelter as to how long the animals will be held before considering their possible relocation to another facility, fostering, adoption, reuniting with owners, or euthanasia?
- ▶ Is 24-hour security available for the animal shelters?
- ▶ By whom and how will the animals be transported?
- ▶ Should the animals be relocated to another area or moved out of state?

When developing plans for particular cities and the county, the AIC should identify individuals who can help with these situations should the need arise. For instance, a person in the county who transports cattle for a living would be a logical person to ask for assistance if livestock needs to be evacuated. If the individual agrees to be a resource, the AIC would call the contact in an emergency to take charge of moving the animals immediately.

Another area in which residents can help involves determining where to house evacuated animals. This could be handled by locating several people who agree to shelter animals on their own properties and care for them during emergencies. The AIC needs to keep their phone numbers handy so they can be reached at any time.

Once the committee develops a list of all individuals who have agreed to be at its disposal, it should contact them periodically to ensure that they are still willing to participate. It is also a good idea for the local AIC to hold exercises to test how the plan will work. 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 already 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 happening.

In addition, the AIC should build into its plan the requirement to keep activity logs on all issues that are discussed. These logs, which should be accessible at any time, will contain the disaster scenarios developed from either exercises or from real events. They 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.

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 AIC attend these meetings to provide information if animal issues are discussed.

The ultimate objective for counties is to have a plan that will help citizens prepare local officials to deal effectively with an animal disaster. It requires communication and creativity. By understanding the AIC plan guidelines, members of the county AIC will be better equipped to develop a plan that works best for their county.



Exercises should be held to practice implementing the disaster plan.