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BEST PRACTICE

Shelter Operations: Pet-Friendly Shelters

PURPOSE

Outlines the essential issues that jurisdictions should consider when developing plans to provide pet-friendly sheltering for people before, during, or after an emergency that requires a large-scale evacuation.

SUMMARY

Evacuation and sheltering operations inevitably involve endangered people who own pets, but most emergency shelters do not accept pets due to health and safety regulations. If there is no opportunity to bring their pets with them to safety, some pet owners will refuse to evacuate or will delay evacuation. According to a Fritz Institute survey, approximately 44% of the people who did not evacuate for Hurricane Katrina stayed, at least in part, because they did not want to leave their pets behind.

Pet-friendly sheltering is one of the most common methods of providing emergency accommodations for pet owners and their animals. A pet-friendly shelter is a public human emergency shelter that is located within the same area or facility as an emergency shelter for pets. These shelters typically allow pet owners to take care of their own animals, reducing the shelters' logistical and staffing requirements. The presence of pet-friendly shelters can increase the likelihood that endangered pet owners will evacuate to safety with their animals during an emergency.

Pet-friendly shelter guidance does not apply to service animals. Service animals should never be separated from their owners, under any circumstance.

This document outlines the essential issues that jurisdictions should consider when developing plans to establish pet-friendly emergency shelters. This document is divided into the following sections:

- Initial Planning;
- The Shelter Facility;
- The Human Shelter;
- Shelter Operations;
- Registration and Animal Intake;
- Animal Housing and Care;
- Public Outreach and Information;
- Funding; and
- References.

Although this document does not directly reference pet transportation, some sheltering operations may involve transporting animals to or from a pet-friendly shelter. For this reason, this document lists several helpful guidance documents concerning animal transportation on page 16 of the "[References](#)" section below.

DESCRIPTION

Pre-Incident Planning

Pet-Friendly Shelter Organizers

Pet-friendly shelters are most frequently organized by either local animal control offices or county/state animal response teams. Animal control offices typically run a jurisdiction's public shelter for un-owned animals and have staffs with extensive animal-handling experience. Animal control staff members are employees of the local government. Animal response teams, on the other hand, are public-private partnerships of government agencies (e.g. animal control offices, emergency management agencies), non-profit organizations (e.g. humane societies, animal rescue groups), businesses (e.g. kennels, ~~dog clubs~~), and concerned citizens (volunteers). Some states do not have animal response teams, other states have statewide teams, and still other states have statewide, local, and/or autonomous teams.

Animal response teams can also be known as:

- Animal and Agricultural Response Teams;
- County Animal Response Teams (CART);
- Disaster Animal Response Teams (DART); and
- State Animal Response Teams (SART).

Establishing Partnerships

Pet-friendly shelters are established and operated only as a result of partnerships between the pet-friendly shelter organizer and the local mass care provider, the local emergency management agency, and the owner of the shelter facility. Pet-friendly shelter organizers should also coordinate with animal care organizations, private businesses, the media, and non-profit organizations that can provide valuable expertise, resources, and visibility for the shelter. For assistance identifying potential partners in your community, refer to the Florida State Agricultural Response Team's training course on [Pets and Disasters: Identifying Community Needs and Resources](#).

Shelter organizers must establish strong relationships with the local mass care provider since the pet section and the human section of a pet-friendly shelter are typically operated and funded independently of one another. Depending on the jurisdiction, the primary mass care provider may be the American Red Cross, social services, a church, or a school board. Since the mass care provider will often be concerned that the pet shelter staff will rely on them for assistance during an emergency, the pet shelter organizer should be able to clearly demonstrate that it will be able to operate independently. To this end, the pet shelter organizer and the mass care provider should consider developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of each participating organization. Strong support from local emergency management agencies can also help shelter organizers win the cooperation of reluctant mass care providers.

See the American Red Cross publication, [Pet Sheltering: Building Community Response](#), for some suggestions regarding the Red Cross's role in emergency pet sheltering.

Creating Operating Procedures

Shelter organizers must develop standard operating procedures (SOP) for pet shelter operations in order to win support from mass care providers and other potential partners. These SOPs will allow shelter organizers to demonstrate that they have established

For a sample MOU, see the [Big Bend Disaster Animal Response Team's statement of understanding](#) with the Red Cross.

For information on how to gain support for a pet-friendly shelter proposal, see North Carolina's guidance document on [Finding, Staffing, and Operating a Co-Located Companion Animal Shelter](#).

procedures and processes to manage shelter operations. Established SOPs will help the shelter organizers to dissuade fears that the pet shelter would be a burden on human shelter operations. A shelter SOP should clearly describe the shelter's operations and management structure, including:

- Facility checks before and after shelter operations;
- Animal registration and intake;
- Shelter rules;
- Providing security to staff and animals;
- Owner visitation policies;
- Staff management and organization;
- Animal care and handling procedures;
- Roles and responsibilities; and
- Copies of required forms and documentation.

For samples of specific jurisdictions' pet-friendly shelter SOPs, see the list of [Plans](#) under the [References](#) section of this document.

Shelter Staffing

The pet shelter should be staffed by qualified animal care personnel with animal handling experience. Some shelters plan to rely solely upon local animal control staff, whereas others plan to use groups of trained, registered volunteers from the community or region. If a shelter organizer plans to use volunteers to staff the pet section of a pet-friendly shelter, that organization should take measures to register and train these volunteers in advance of an incident. Registering and training volunteers before an emergency allows the shelter operator to rely upon a pre-established cadre of skilled volunteers during an event. Shelter organizers should consider designating a volunteer coordinator to manage volunteer recruitment, registration, job assignments, and orientation.

View Community of Hillsborough Animal and Agricultural Response Team's (CHAART) volunteer forms:

- [Application](#)
- [Sign-In/Sign-Out Log](#)
- [Convergent Volunteer Registration](#)

Some volunteer-dependent shelters have also developed protocols to register and use spontaneous (i.e. convergent), untrained volunteers when additional manpower is needed. These protocols establish processes to quickly register spontaneous volunteers and to assign them to tasks that they are qualified to perform.

The [Empire State Animal Response Team](#) offers classroom, hands-on, and online training on:

- State and County Animal Response Teams
- Animal Care, Handling, and Control
- Temporary Emergency Animal Sheltering
- Pet-Friendly Sheltering
- Incident Command System
- Zoonotic Disease Awareness

Shelter Staff Training

All pet shelter staff members (and volunteers, if possible) should complete the following training courses to prepare themselves to operate under the shelter management system and to respond to emergency situations:

- Adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and basic first aid;
- Animal first aid;
- Disaster animal response;
- [Incident Command System \(ICS\)](#);
- [National Incident Management System](#);
- [National Response Plan](#);

The [Humane Society of the United States](#) (HSUS) offers disaster animal response and emergency animal shelter training courses throughout the year. For more information, see the [HSUS Disaster Training Web site](#).

- [Animals in Disasters, Module A](#); and
- [Animals in Disasters, Module B](#).

Shelter Facility

Potential Facilities

Pet-friendly shelters can potentially be set up in any location that is suitable for a human emergency shelter. Typically, pet-friendly shelters are created by developing plans to establish pet shelters in buildings already designated to contain human shelters during an emergency. Buildings often have features such as restrooms, running water, adequate lighting, and electricity that can greatly facilitate shelter operations. Buildings also offer protection if the shelter is going to be used during a weather-related event such as a hurricane. Since hurricane-vulnerable jurisdictions have the most experience in pet-friendly sheltering, this document will focus on pet-friendly shelters that use these indoor facilities.

Pet-friendly shelters can also be established at outdoor locations for non-weather-related emergencies or post-disaster sheltering. Outdoor shelters should be established at locations that are open, accessible, and easy to locate—such as fairgrounds, parking lots, and sports fields. The [Mississippi Domestic Cat and Dog Sheltering Plan](#) recommends that outdoor shelters have access to running water and be set up under a sturdy structure, such as a military-grade tent, in case of inclement weather.

Physically Separate Human and Animal Shelters

The majority of emergency shelters, notably American Red Cross shelters, require animal shelters to be physically separate from human shelters. State health and safety regulations generally do not permit humans and pets to be sheltered in the same room. Stressed animals are more likely to exhibit violent behavior, so there is an increased risk for injury and potential infection from animal bites and scratches. Housing pets together with humans also poses serious health risks for some people, particularly immunocompromised people and people with asthma or allergies triggered by pet dander, feathers, or fur. For more information, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Animals in Public Evacuation Centers](#) fact sheet.

When locating an animal shelter in the same building as a human shelter, shelter staff should take measures to ensure that the facility minimizes these health risks to the human evacuees. For example, shelter staff should consider whether the human shelter and the animal shelter can be established in non-adjacent areas of the building. Shelter staff should also determine whether the human and animal areas would be operating on the same heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) system, which could spread animal allergens and pathogens to the human shelter.

Coordination with Facility Owner

Before setting up a pet-friendly shelter, pet shelter staff members and a facility representative should conduct an inspection of the animal area to ensure that the space meets basic safety requirements and to identify any pre-existing damage or problems. A documented and validated walk-through will also ensure that pet shelter staff will not be held responsible for any of the facility's pre-existing conditions after the shelter's closing. Pre-occupancy inspections typically confirm/identify:

- Adequate lighting;
- Ingress and egress through all doorways;
- Readily available fire extinguishers;

For a walk-through template form, see [North Carolina's Pet-Friendly Shelter Pre-Occupancy Inspection/Walk-Through Form](#).

- Functioning water and power;
- Functioning restrooms;
- Non-carpeted floors;
- Operational ventilation; and
- Scratches, scuffs, and damages to floors, window, walls, and doors.

Mass care providers and pet shelter organizers can only use shelter facilities with the permission of facility owners. Facility owners are principally concerned that shelter operations do not damage the facility and that their facility can reopen immediately after the shelter's closure. Pet shelter organizers should develop procedures to protect the facility throughout shelter operations and to quickly restore the facility to its original condition after the shelter's closure. After shelter operations, pet shelter staff must thoroughly clean and disinfect all building facilities, including floors, handrails, water fountains, and doorknobs. To speed the shelter's closure, shelter-owned equipment such as animal crates and kennels may be removed to an off-site location, where they can be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected without delaying the facility's restoration.

Pet Shelter Operations Management

Pet shelter staff should use ICS (the Incident Command System) to organize and manage the shelter's operations. ICS is a management structure that facilitates command, operational, planning, logistical, financial, and administrative activities. Command personnel should include a public information officer to communicate with the public and a safety officer to monitor the safety of shelter operations. All pet shelter staff (and volunteers, if possible) should complete basic ICS training to familiarize themselves with its terminology, organizational structure, and functions.

View the Louisiana State Animal Response Team's pet-friendly shelter [ICS organizational chart](#).

Shelter managers should take all possible measures to make the command structure clear to volunteers who do not normally work together in their shelter roles. For example, the CHAART displays the shelter's ICS organizational chart prominently within the shelter as a reference for volunteers and shelter staff. In addition, the CHAART provides each staff member with a color-coded badge that identifies which jobs each person is qualified to perform during an incident:

- **Black:** Signifies the incident commander and his/her assistant. Duties include all the below, except veterinary-related responsibilities.
- **Red:** All the below, plus handling aggressive or agitated animals and providing medical care to injured or ill animals.
- **Yellow:** All the below, plus duties in the animal sheltering areas, such as animal observation and animal care.
- **Green:** Administrative duties such as shelter check-in, paperwork, set-up, and break-down.

Necessary Supplies

Pet shelter organizers must identify the types and quantities of equipment and supplies that will be needed to operate the shelter. These supplies typically include:

- Administrative supplies;
- Animal care supplies (e.g. food, litter, bowls);
- Cages or crates;
- Cleaning supplies;

View [Marion County's pet-friendly shelter equipment purchase list](#), which includes cost estimates for necessary items.

- First aid/medical supplies; and
- Signage to guide evacuees.

Pet shelter organizers should coordinate with the facility owner to identify if any of the building's supplies or equipment would be available for use by shelter personnel. Frequently, however, shelter staff will not be able to use any facility resources other than the actual floor space.

Shelter organizers should determine early in the planning process which supplies the shelter will provide and which supplies pet owners will be required to provide. Some pet-friendly shelters provide all the supplies necessary for operating the shelter, which allows these shelters to readily accept and support unprepared pet owners. However, since self-sufficiency is costly, many shelters ask pet owners to supply their animal's cage or crate, regularly taken medication, water bowl, leash or harness, and toys. Pet owners who bring the requested items will significantly reduce these shelters' resource requirements. Still, many of these shelters maintain backup supplies to accommodate pet owners who arrive without these supplies or with supplies that are unsuitable for shelter use.

Shelter organizers should consider purchasing a trailer to store all the equipment needed for the pet portion of a pet-friendly shelter. Shelter organizers can store the trailer off-site and quickly transport the equipment to the shelter site in the event of an emergency. See the *LLIS.gov* Practice Note, [Shelter Operations: Arlington County's Mobile Emergency Pet Shelter](#), for information on how Arlington County, Virginia, funded and maintains its pet shelter supply trailer.



Hillsborough County, Florida's Supply Trailer

Shelter organizers should carefully consider whether to use plastic, airline-type animal crates or wire cages to house the sheltered animals. Plastic airline transport cages may not provide enough ventilation for animals kept in unairconditioned facilities, whereas wire cages allow for improved air circulation. However, plastic airline cages contain animal feces and urine far better than wire cages. Shelter managers should choose the type of animal crate based upon their specific environmental and facility-related requirements.

Safety and Security

Pet shelter staff may be exposed to numerous hazards during shelter operations, including obstructed corridors and fire exits, electrical shock, and hazardous chemicals. Pet shelter managers should require all shelter staff to undergo a safety training program to mitigate the risk of injury due to these hazards.

Pet-friendly shelters should also take provisions to maintain the security of shelter staff, the animals, and any controlled substances (e.g. veterinary medicines) housed on the premises. For example, controlled veterinary substances should be secured within locked cabinets or rooms; access should be limited to only authorized veterinary personnel. Shelter staff should also develop procedures for nighttime operations that include locked doors and a staff presence at all hours. If the shelter is going to be open for a significant period of time, shelter managers should consider providing security personnel to maintain a 24-hour presence at the shelter.

Registration and Animal Intake

All pet-friendly shelters require pet owners to complete registration documentation that releases the shelter from liability and provides the identification information of owners and their animals. The registration process allows pet shelter staff to document which animals belong to which evacuees, so the staff can return the animals to their correct owners when the shelter closes.

Pre-Registration

Some jurisdictions require potential evacuees to register for the pet-friendly shelter prior to the shelter's establishment. Jurisdictions with limited pet-friendly shelter space sometimes choose to pre-register the most vulnerable people to ensure that they are guaranteed shelter space during an emergency. For example, Pinellas County, Florida, reserves space in its pet-friendly shelters for the people who would be most at risk during a hurricane: those who live in manufactured homes and in the most high-risk storm surge zones.

Jurisdictions that choose to pre-register shelter occupants should develop contingency plans to handle non-registered pet owners who might arrive prior to or during an emergency. For example, Pinellas County Animal Services plans to ask non-registered pet owners to make other arrangements but will accommodate them at the shelter when tropical storm-force winds are imminent. If the non-registered pet owners do not have proper immunization records, their animals will be isolated from the other pets at the shelter.

Shelter operators may want to use pre-registration to better plan for the number of people and animals that will use a shelter during an emergency, but pre-registration numbers will often differ substantially from actual shelter usage. Many individuals who pre-register do so as part of a larger disaster plan and do not actually need to use the pet-friendly shelter; on the other hand, pet owners who do not pre-register often do not plan for an alternative and will ultimately need to stay at the shelter. As a result of this behavior, pre-registration numbers can be misleading planning aids.

The Animal Intake and Registration Area

The intake and registration area is the location where pet owners arrive with their animals and fill out the paperwork necessary to house their pets in the shelter. The intake and registration area typically consists of multiple tables that are staffed by pet shelter staff members who assist newly arriving pet owners. The registration area should also include a triage area for pet shelter staff to perform an initial health assessment of the incoming animals and to assign the animals to appropriate cages, if they have not been provided.

View the Hillsborough County CHAART's [recommended equipment and supply list for the animal intake and registration area](#).

The pet shelter's intake and registration area should be located near an entry point that can be easily reached from the human shelter. Since shelter evacuees must typically register at both the human shelter and the animal shelter registration desks, coordination between the two shelters' desks is essential. The main shelter desk should direct evacuees with pets to the pet shelter registration desk, and, when possible, directional signs should be posted along the way to guide pet owners to the pet shelter entrance. Marion County, Florida's, pet-friendly shelter maintains two-way radio communications between the human and the animal shelter registration desks, which allows the pet shelter staff to better prepare for new arrivals and to contact owners regarding issues with their animals. For more on this practice, view the *LLIS.gov* Practice Note, [Emergency Animal Sheltering: The Marion County, Florida, Pet-friendly Shelter's Radio Communications between Registration Desks](#).

Shelter Registration Process

The first step in the registration process is to have the pet owners sign a shelter registration and agreement form that outlines the shelter's rules and the owner's responsibilities. This form constitutes an agreement between the pet owner and the pet-friendly shelter, stating that each owner will abide by the rules of the shelter. The registration and agreement form also typically removes liability from the shelter staff for any injury or illness that might befall the pets in their care. Since this form is legal in nature, shelter organizers should consult local attorneys to ensure that the form complies with state and federal laws.

View North Carolina's Pet-Friendly Evacuation Shelter Registration and Agreement [form template](#).

Shelter staff should verbally discuss this form with pet owners to ensure that the owners fully understand the shelter rules. Shelter staff can then present the pet owners with a written copy of the form for future reference. This practice can increase the likelihood that the pet owners will remember and comply with these rules during shelter operations.

Shelter staff should assign identification numbers to pet owners during the registration process. Each identification number coincides with an intake number attached to each owner's personal information during registration. The use of identification numbers helps to structure owners' interactions with shelter animals and facilitates an easier discharge process when the shelter closes. The Hillsborough County, Florida, CHAART uses each owner's driver's license or resident identification number as his or her shelter identification number. When discharging pets, the owners are able to confirm ownership by presenting the driver's license or resident identification card that they used to register the animals.

Animal Intake Process

Pet owners or shelter staff members must also fill out animal intake forms (a.k.a. animal admission forms) during the registration process. Animal intake forms provide pet shelter staff with specific information on the animal being admitted to the shelter, such as:

- Name;
- Species and breed;
- Sex;
- Color;
- Distinctive markings;
- Age;
- Microchip identification number (scanner required); and
- Health conditions and required medication.

The animal intake information, or some abbreviated version of this information, should be attached to the animal's crate by means of a "cage card." The cage card should include the animal's identification information, the owner's name and sleeping location, medical information, and behavioral notes to shelter staff. Cage cards provide shelter staff with information needed to deal with the animal in the event of an emergency.

View the Hillsborough County CHAART's animal [admission and discharge form](#).



Marion County, Florida's Cage Card

Many pet-friendly shelters also photograph each animal to document unique characteristics and markings that are often not recorded on the animal intake forms. Some jurisdictions photograph each animal together with its owner so the photograph can also be used to verify the animal's associated owner during the discharge process.

Animal Health

Shelter staff should take measures to reduce the presence of pathogens within the animal areas and to protect animal shelter staff from zoonotic diseases. Most shelters require owners to verify that their pets have been properly vaccinated by showing copies of their pets' vaccination records to shelter staff at registration. If a pet owner neglects to bring vaccination records to the shelter, some jurisdictions plan to have the onsite veterinarian administer a rabies vaccination for a small fee.

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that can be transmitted between animals and humans.

Shelter staff should also consider taking measures to combat flea infestations, particularly when animals are sheltered for long periods of time and where animals are sheltered over dirt floors. An effective treatment program includes both initial treatment during animal intake to kill fleas on incoming animals and a shelter-wide application of preventative treatment, which should be administered multiple times for long-term shelter operations.

Pet shelter staff should examine the animals during the intake process to identify any potentially contagious health conditions. Most shelters reserve the right to refuse admittance to animals that appear too ill for the shelter staff's capabilities. If an animal is visibly ill upon admittance, most shelters plan to request the owner to transport the animal to a veterinary clinic for boarding. If this is not possible, the animal may be held in an isolation area until it is possible to transport the animal to an appropriate care facility.

For guidelines on animal management and disease control in pet shelters, see the [CDC and American Veterinary Medical Association's guidance document](#), released after Hurricane Katrina.

Shelter organizers should establish arrangements with one or more nearby veterinary clinics to provide housing for the sick, injured, or aggressive animals that may be brought to the shelter. These agreements should also provide pet shelter staff with a hotline to call any time that shelter employees have a veterinary concern. Some shelters also staff a veterinarian or veterinary technician to provide medical care to animals that become ill or injured during shelter operations.

Animal Housing and Care

Allowable Species

Shelter organizers need to determine which species of animal will be housed at the pet-friendly shelter so shelter staff can take precautions to accommodate those species and communicate this information to the public, if necessary. Many jurisdictions plan to limit pet-friendly sheltering to cats and dogs, which comprise the majority of pets. Limiting shelter availability to cats and dogs reduces the logistical and facility requirements of the shelter since every species has unique food requirements and requires a separate housing area. If a pet-friendly shelter plans to limit the number of allowable species, shelter organizers should establish policies for dealing with pet owners who arrive at the shelter with restricted pets.

If a pet-friendly shelter plans to accept animals other than cats and dogs, shelter staff should be prepared to establish separate housing areas for these species that accommodate their specific needs. For example, reptiles, small mammals, and birds need to be housed in

areas protected from drafts. Reptiles also require electrical outlets to power their heating lamps and daily cage-cleaning to reduce the risk of salmonella poisoning. Shelter organizers who plan on accommodating such animals should consult a veterinary or animal care professional to ensure that the pet-friendly shelter would meet the needs of these animals.

Animal Housing Areas

Pet shelter organizers must designate specific areas to house the animals that will be sheltered during an emergency. Each housing area typically consists of rows and stacks of the animal crates or kennels. Each animal housing area should be set up so that shelter staff and visitors are able to travel unobstructed to the shelter's emergency exits. Shelter staff should consider setting up animal cages so the animals will face away from each other, which will keep the animals calmer and quieter. Some jurisdictions also require that crates or kennels be kept 12 inches or more apart from each other, if space permits.

View Hillsborough County, Florida's [recommended equipment and supply list for dog and cat areas](#).

The animal housing areas should be established in an area that is easy to clean and disinfect. Many jurisdictions require the animal facility to have concrete, tile, or vinyl floors with floor drainage so that the area can be easily cleaned during operations and completely washed down after closing. The Marion County, Florida, Animal Center lines its animal housing area with plastic so that the floor will be protected and will retain its polish after the shelter's closure.



Marion County's Plastic Lining

Shelter staff should designate multiple areas for the animals housed at the pet shelter. For example, cats and other small animals should be housed in the quietest available sections of the shelter. Shelter staff should establish separate housing areas for dogs and cats, so the dogs' barking will not stress and agitate the cats. Pet shelter staff should also consider establishing separate areas for:

- Elderly animals and animals sensitive to noise;
- Animals that are too aggressive to handle;
- Sick or injured animals; and
- Animals in heat.

Animal shelter staff should also designate a room or outdoor space as a "dog relief area." Indoor dog relief areas typically consist of a room lined with plastic and covered with newspapers. Pet owners are usually responsible for cleaning up after their own animals—and laying down fresh newspapers for indoor areas—but shelter staff should clean these areas regularly to prevent the spread of disease and to reduce the presence of unpleasant odors.

Animal Care Responsibilities

Pet owners typically assume most of the responsibilities for caring for their animals, unless the owner is prevented from doing so by a disability or other special need. Owners' responsibilities usually include providing their animals with food and water, cleaning their animals' cages as needed, and taking their dogs to the dog relief area. Pet owners are also responsible for administering any regular medications to their animals. Many jurisdictions

require the owner to keep a record of these administrations on the pet's cage card, in case shelter staff members need to care for that animal during an emergency.

Shelter staff should encourage volunteers and owners to underfeed the animals, since both groups tend to overfeed sheltered pets. Overfeeding animals can cause gastrointestinal upsets, and animals in high-stress environments typically require less food than in normal circumstances. If an animal population begins to exhibit frequent signs of gastrointestinal distress, shelter managers should consider switching the animals to a consistent, low-residue diet.

Animal shelter staff members are typically responsible for monitoring the animals' condition, refilling water bowls as needed, and notifying owners if additional care is required. Shelter staff members are responsible for providing direct animal care only when:

- Pet owners cannot safely travel to the pet shelter;
- An owner cannot provide adequate care because of a disability or other special need;
- An animal becomes ill or injured at the shelter;
- The pet owners are being sheltered in an off-site facility; or
- Evacuees bring stray or abandoned animals to the shelter.

Aggressive Animals

Most shelters reserve the right to refuse admittance to animals that appear too aggressive for the shelter to handle. However, even normally docile animals can exhibit aggressive behavior when under extreme stress and discomfort. Shelter managers should enforce several shelter rules to reduce the risk of bites and other injuries:

- Aggressive animals should be handled only by their respective owners or trained staff members;
- All animals on shelter property should be leashed or confined at all times; and
- Pet owners should not handle or touch pets other than their own.

Shelter managers should consider posting these—and all other—shelter rules on signs throughout the shelter; this practice helps to reinforce the rules and to increase compliance during shelter operations.

The Hillsborough County, Florida, CHAART promotes workplace safety by clearly identifying an animal's behavior through color-coded cage cards. Each color communicates specific instructions to shelter staff to decrease the likelihood of animal bites and other injuries:

- **Green cage card:** The animal is very friendly in a shelter environment. Shelter staff may add water and walk as needed.
- **Yellow cage card:** The animal may be frightened in a shelter environment. Only designated personnel are permitted to interact with these animals. Yellow cage cards are also issued if the pet's owner was uncertain of how the animal would act in a shelter environment.
- **Red cage card:** The animal is known to be aggressive or fearful of strangers. Only designated personnel are permitted to interact with these animals.

Covering the animals' crates with blankets, towels, or sheets can also reduce the animals' stress levels by decreasing their exposure to bright lights and distractions. However, this tactic may not be practicable in hot, un-air-conditioned environments where shelter personnel must take steps to maximize air circulation.

Shelter Access

Pet-friendly shelters may choose to limit animal shelter access to the shelter staff and pet owners who have been designated to care for their animals. Limiting shelter access reduces the number of people in the shelter—which decreases animals' stress levels and benefits shelters with limited floor space—and can increase the facility's security by preventing and deterring the presence of unauthorized persons. Restricting the presence of children in the shelter can also help to prevent potentially dangerous incidents and to improve overall compliance with shelter rules.

Pet shelter staff can control access to the shelter by checking the identification (e.g. driver's license) of each person requesting entrance to the shelter. However, this process can prove time-consuming and laborious, especially for larger shelters. The Hillsborough County, Florida, CHAART provides pet owners with identification wristbands at registration to easily identify them as authorized caretakers. The CHAART provides only one wristband per family to reduce crowding in the facility.

Shelter access control can be facilitated by scheduling designated visiting and care hours for the pets. Most jurisdictions that establish care schedules for pet owners typically schedule two time periods, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. At all times not designated as visiting hours, only animal shelter staff are allowed in the shelter. During these times, shelter staff may choose to limit their activities and turn off the shelter lights. Establishing a daily operations schedule that provides lights-off times for the animals can significantly reduce the animals' stress levels.

View more information on [scheduling daily lights-off time periods](#) to reduce animals' stress levels.

Shelters located in host areas—areas not affected by the emergency—can implement a check-in/check-out process to allow evacuees to take their animals out of the shelter during the day. Many evacuees will travel outside of the human shelter during the day; these evacuees will often want to bring their pets with them. A check-in/check-out process allows shelter staff to track and manage the temporary release of these pets.

Public Information and Outreach Pet-Friendly Shelter Information

Most jurisdictions advertise the existence of their planned pet-friendly shelters through public outreach campaigns consisting of shelter information brochures, press releases, and Web site postings. When pet owners know about the existence of pet-friendly sheltering, they are less likely to bring animals to public shelters that do not accept pets. Strong public communication can also increase the likelihood that pet owners take preparations to comply with shelter requirements, such as bringing their animals' vaccination records and medication.

Emergency management agencies and/or animal control officers should coordinate with newspapers, radio stations, and television stations to determine the best way to communicate this information before, during, and after an incident. For example, Sarasota County, Florida, publishes a [shelter information map](#) that identifies the location of all county emergency shelters and clearly specifies which shelters accept cats and dogs. Sarasota County also hosts an [online shelter information map](#) that displays the addresses, pet policies, and current activation level of each county emergency shelter. Sarasota's online tool allows residents to type in their home addresses and to retrieve directions to any of the area's shelters.

Some areas choose to not communicate their emergency pet sheltering capability to the public. These areas rely on strong personal preparedness messaging to encourage pet owners to identify and pre-arrange private accommodations for an emergency evacuation. For example, the Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross and the Big Bend Disaster Animal Response Team (DART) plan not to advertise the area's pet-friendly shelter during an emergency. Big Bend DART accommodates pets of evacuees staying at public shelters during emergencies, but they also provide pet owners with information on pet-friendly hotels and campgrounds in the area, as well as information packets on disaster preparedness with pets.

The Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross and the Big Bend DART operate in Tallahassee, Florida, and the surrounding region.

Pet Preparedness

Pet owners should view pet-friendly shelters as a last resort, since both human and animal shelters are often crowded, noisy, and stressful. Outreach campaigns that stress pet preparedness can increase the likelihood that pet owners will identify and use private accommodations for emergency sheltering, rather than relying on public services such as pet-friendly shelters. Jurisdictions that offer pet-friendly sheltering should also consider initiating pet emergency preparedness campaigns that include the following messages:

- Pet owners should locate and prearrange a safe location—such as a pet-friendly hotel, motel, or a relative's home—where they will evacuate themselves and their animals in the event of an emergency. Alternatively, pet owners should make arrangements to board their animals at a kennel or veterinary clinic outside the emergency area.
- Pet owners should assemble go-kits of emergency supplies for their pets. These go-kits should contain necessary items such as pet food, water, bedding, toys, a leash and/or carrier, and the pet's medications and veterinary records.
- Pet owners should include a current photo of their pet, preferably showing them holding the animal, in a re-sealable bag with their address, a copy of vaccination records, the pet's microchip number, or a business card from their veterinarian.


Local emergency management or animal control officers should also consider publicizing a [list of pet-friendly hotels and motels](#) that will accept pets in the event of an emergency. Public communication of this information can increase the likelihood that pet owners will evacuate to these private establishments in the event of an emergency. Organizations collecting this information should be aware that some establishments that do not accept pets will amend their pet policies in the event of an emergency.


Funding

One of the largest constraints on pet-friendly shelter development is the lack of funding for the equipment and manpower needed to run the shelter.

The 2006 federal [Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards \(PETS\) Act](#) authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to fund state and local animal emergency preparedness actions such as "the procurement, construction, leasing, or renovating of emergency shelter facilities and materials that will accommodate people with pets and service animals." The PETS Act also allows FEMA to reimburse state animal rescue, care, and shelter

"Eligible animal shelter costs include costs associated with the provisions of rescue, shelter, care, and essential needs (e.g. inoculations) for evacuee and rescued household pets and service animals, to include veterinary staff for emergency and immediate life-stabilizing care."
[-FEMA Disaster Assistance Policy: Eligible Costs Related to Evacuations and Sheltering](#)

actions taken in response to a federally declared emergency (see box). 

 Some jurisdictions have successfully solicited donations of equipment and supplies from non-profit organizations and area businesses. Volunteer groups, emergency responders, and non-profit organizations can also seek grants from numerous animal-related organizations. Lists of available grants can be found at Web sites such as the Humane Society of the United States' [Financial Assistance page](#) and Shelter Source's [Grant and Program Resources page](#).

Other jurisdictions have gathered funds by increasing locally administered fees. For example, Charlotte County, Florida, will finance its emergency pet-friendly shelter through funds collected from a five percent surcharge on animal license fees and fines for animal-related offenses.

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