

# ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING ANIMAL SHELTERS

## READY, SET, SHELTER!

Once a disaster incident happens, and the media announces animals may be sheltered at a location a number of issues will quickly develop. This is specially the case if you have an efficient Animal Evacuation Team out in the field.

## USE APPROVAL AND SUITABILITY EVALUATION

In many areas there is an unfounded assumption fairgrounds and livestock sale yards can be used for sheltering animals. Most fairgrounds are operated by fair boards who may or may not have agreements with Emergency Management to utilize the site.

Most livestock sale yards are private businesses which have their own operations, schedules and costs. Seldom do they have agreements with authorities for use.

All sites need to be evaluated, in advance, to see which species could safely be held at a site and what the capacity of the site is for each species. Remember, fairgrounds are designed for domesticated animals which are often halter broke and only for a limited amount of time with large numbers of available

manpower. In many cases, some of the infrastructure is hauled in and only available during a fair or show.

All sites may have events and animals already in place limiting use for emergencies.

The first considerations should be:

- Do we have use of the facility and what is the current status of the facility?
- Is it compatible with the species and numbers we expect?
- Will it be out of the risk zone?

## SPECIES CONSIDERATIONS

During disasters community shelters see many species including pigs, horses, cattle, sheep, alpaca, llama, buffalo, goats, poultry, ostrich, emu, yaks and even some exotic animals. At times it may be necessary to shelter pets such as dogs, cats, birds and small animals on the same sites. But unlike pets, the numbers of large animals and livestock can be overwhelming if not prepared.

All animals will come in with a variety of age, status, behavior, compatibility and other considerations such as potential to breed. Most will come to a shelter *under duress* which places requirements on staff qualifications and housing structure. Some may not be tame, familiar with handling or housing arrangements.

## SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

In most cases it will be necessary to co-house similar species together during a large event by mixing animals from different owners in community corrals, pens and pastures. As communities have grown around fairgrounds, the availability of pastures, paddocks and access routes diminishes gradually.

## SETTING UP THE SHELTER

Once use and appropriateness of the site has been established, secure and limit access to the site except through



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Temporary animal shelter

predetermined and clearly marked corridors. The individual or entity who opens the shelter will become legally and physically responsible for the site and animal care until demobilized in most states.

A shelter site should be inspected for equipment, panels and fixtures which may be faulty or have protrusions which can injure animals or workers. The site should have access to water, shelter and lanes that allow movement of animals without aggressive handling or risk to workers. The site should have areas for workers to screen incoming animals, restroom and some facility for food. Sites should also have a location to securely store feed, documents and equipment. Power, phone and internet connections are advisable utilities.

Shelter sites should include pens, stall, paddocks and pens with fencing at appropriate heights to control and discourage animals seeking to jump, crawl or dig out.

## MANPOWER AND OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

If an incident is serious enough to be declared an emergency or disaster it is understood the shelter will require from four to 24 hours to setup and may have to operate from one to 30 days. This will require staffing for each operational period as well as access control, staff support, donation management, public information functions and documentation of animals, hours, ownership and care.

Access control will need to be tightly controlled to document the check-in and care functions as well as deliveries.

During initial setup and check-in of animals and media coverage begins, a serious amount of curiosity and emotional response will arise in nearby communities. It is crucial to limit access to documented animal owners and “qualified” volunteer staff.



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Volunteers should have practical experience handling several species at least 100 hours each year, be familiar with each species characteristics and flight or fight zones and be competent using appropriate equipment in adverse conditions. Each shelter volunteer should be in suitable physical condition to pass the FEMA Search and Rescue fitness criteria (be able to traverse three miles in 45 minutes with 25-pound payloads). Any health issues which may limit capability should reassign them to support roles.

A number of volunteers will come forward who do not fit hands-on responsibilities. These volunteers can be used for recordkeeping, errands, documentation and manning telephones.

For check-in procedures staff should include:

- veterinarian or vet assistant to evaluate animals,
- livestock official to verify ownership and legalities,
- team leader,
- two suitable volunteers for each species housed,
- number of feed and water technicians,
- donations and feed manager,
- media liaison to work with Incident Command, and
- suitable site security.

## THE CHECK-IN

A check-in process should include:

- Having animals counted, described and photographed beginning a file with time and date.
- Verifying origin of the animals, who delivered them and any ownership documentation available.
- A health evaluation of the animal(s) including age, condition, injuries, special needs, behavior and other data.
- A shelter agreement form or liability waiver signed by the owner covering projected placement, care and feed including the owner's responsibility. This should include permission to utilize standard care and control for the animal in the owner's absence.
- Space assignment and movement of the animal into shelter.

## OPERATIONAL PERIOD CARE

An operational plan should be developed for each operational period (usually 12 hours) documenting assignments, contact information, species and numbers, care schedules and access control.

During sheltering a sub-team should check all animals each 30 minutes for the first 12 hours and every hour after. Checks should be recorded on a sheltering status sheet for each period

that will track possible issues, feeding, watering, placement and signature of staff responsible.

At the end of each operational period, a briefing should be held to transition the demobilizing team to the next team.

Health issues should be forwarded to veterinarians, legal issues should be forwarded to owners and livestock officials, access requests should be forwarded to team leader or incident command, and media or visitation requests should be forwarded to the Public Information Officer.

## **LIABILITY ISSUES**

It should be noted a number of liability issues can surface during livestock sheltering, including:

- Ownership of animals may be disputed.
- Owners have not given permission for media to cover their animals.
- Care needs to meet veterinary standards and quality assurance guidelines.
- If intact animals are sheltered, they may fight or breed, generating long-term issues.
- There have been incidents of animals being stolen from shelters.
- Feed and water must be safe and in appropriate amounts in a timely manner.
- Any worker or volunteer injuries must be addressed appropriately.
- And, there are always some new and surprising issues.

## **COST AND DONATION DOCUMENTATION**

All expenses including manhours need to be tracked carefully for the local emergency manager to request disaster reimbursement. Private information on animals and owners needs to remain confidential unless the release is approved by those individuals. All donations need to be tracked including item, date, time, amount, quality, value and use.

Discourage unrequested donations or advertising for them. All supplies must be managed and disposed of or returned requiring costs. Ask donors to contact a specific telephone desk to identify what is needed and when it is needed. Passing all donations through a non-profit provides some tax advantage.

## **EXTENDED OPERATION OF SHELTERS**

Often volunteers will burn up their availability in the first 48 hours after which they may not be available. Team leaders need to plan for operational periods that adjust with available help for the shelter. That could mean every two to four hours different people are needed.

Often the amount of manpower can be reduced after 24 hours but that depends on how many animals are being sheltered and the status of the disaster impact. A team leader or shelter branch director can place resource requests with the Logistics Branch of Incident Command for each operational period. National resources may be available via the Extension Disaster Education Network ([extensiondisaster.net](http://extensiondisaster.net)) and other resources to deal with extended operations.

A daily cost summary should be provided to incident command to assist in future planning for expansion, maintenance or demobilization.

**ALWAYS** keep incident command advised of your capacity and status!

## **OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES**

Often the owners of animals placed in shelters are also impacted in a traumatic manner. They may not have access or transportation, much less any means to care for animals. Screen their capability and intent as they check in. Clearly denote and document their expectations and yours. Identify set access hours and behavioral guidelines for owners. This should include privacy of others, ownership of equipment and other animals adjacent to them.

If owners are not willing to accept shelter guidelines set for the greater good, refer the issue to team leaders, livestock officials and law enforcement. All owners are still responsible for their animals during sheltering and when the shelter closes, including care requirements and costs.

Civil and criminal laws are still in play as per decisions of community and state officials. Refer issues to authorities but document everything.

## **DEMOBILIZATION OF THE SHELTER**

Demobilization is when you disable the resource in a planned gradual manner and release your staff and volunteers. Here are some basic steps:

1. Plan and phase the shutdown of the shelter after all emergency and disaster responses are down-graded.
2. Notify livestock owners, the public and all volunteers of the time and date the shelter will close. Require livestock owners to make other arrangements for their animals and move them prior to the closing. Set a check out period of 12-24 hours if possible.
3. Have livestock officials and team members verify ownership of each animal prior to it leaving the premises. Have the owner and/or hauler of representative provide contact information and a destination for the animals

with signatures, photographs of vehicles and other documentation. Have them sign a release accepting control of the livestock.

4. Consolidate and clean facilities as they empty.
5. Notify incident command and the staging officer when demobilization is complete.

## WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE END

- Left over supplies to dispose of.
- Unclaimed animals or owners who refuse to move them.
- Conflicts over livestock ownership.
- Missing animals or sick animals.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on operating a livestock or animal shelter, contact your local Extension office who can provide access to sheltering experts and national EDEN Teams.



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