

Animals in Disasters

MODULE A UNIT 2

Introduction

Overview

This unit examines the reasons why animal care during disasters is a concern for the animal owners, animal industries, emergency management, and the general public. It describes the animal-care community, examines the societal impacts of animal ownership, and introduces the concept of the human-animal bond as a major factor affecting animal owners and care providers in a disaster.

This unit is the same in both Module A and Module B. If you are already familiar with the material, you may review it, or skip ahead to Unit 3.

Objectives

Upon completion of this unit you should be able to:

- ▶ List the major reasons why it is important to consider animals in disasters
- ▶ Describe the magnitude of animal ownership in the United States
- ▶ Define the human-animal bond
- ▶ Describe the ways in which animal care and emergency management are related

Disaster preparedness

Our world is dangerous – earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, floods, hazardous chemicals, and nuclear wastes threaten us. The best disaster preparedness starts with personal protection and safety. An attitude of personal responsibility allows individuals and interest groups to identify, prioritize and mitigate issues that arise in disasters. When individuals and interest groups collaborate with emergency management officials in their communities, programs based on the community's needs, expertise and resources can be developed.

Animals in society

Our society benefits from improved efficiency and health care in livestock production systems. Emergency management and other Federal and State departments have traditionally protected these benefits in disasters. Support for animal agriculture is warranted, as the U.S. animal agriculture industry generates nearly \$90 billion each year. Because agriculture now depends on fewer people to produce our nation's food supply, emergency management systems are of high priority.

In addition to livestock production, society recognizes other benefits from animals. One benefit is the improved quality of life that animal owners and care providers get from living and working with animals that are considered companions, confidants, health facilitators and status symbols. This is partly reflected by an increase in the revenue the pet industry generates. In the mid-1990s, this industry was estimated to generate between \$20 and \$30 billion per year.

The importance of animals in the United States is evidenced by:

- ▶ An increasing appreciation of pets as human companions, and
- ▶ A decreasing portion of the population employed in agriculture. Because of this, food production in the United States relies on fewer people.

Reflecting these changes, the media often reports the needs of animals, both domestic and wild, affected by disasters. The needs of animals and their owners have been prominent issues in several U.S. disasters.

We encourage emergency managers and the animal-care community to share their emergency plans. By doing so, expertise and resources necessary for successful disaster response may also be shared.

The following table lists examples of issues that arise because of animals in disasters.

Animals in Disasters – Issues

- ▶ After the Three Mile Island, PA, nuclear accident in 1979, many misinformed owners left animals to stray resulting in traffic accidents and an overloading of humane shelters and veterinary practices.
- ▶ During the evacuation from a large white phosphorus and liquid sulfur spill in Dayton, OH, in 1984, pet owners attempting to rescue their pets created traffic jams by driving in the opposite direction to the evacuating traffic.
- ▶ Following floods in Snohomish Valley, WA, in 1991, some farmers felt so grief-stricken by the drowning of their cows that they left agriculture altogether.
- ▶ Following the Oakland, CA, firestorm in 1991, hundreds of cats and dogs were never reunited with their owners because their owners could not be found.
- ▶ After Hurricane Andrew struck Southern Florida, in 1992, many victims were distressed when they discovered that they could not stay at public shelters if they had pets with them.
- ▶ After a tornado in West Lafayette, IN, in 1994, several animal owners in public shelters showed psychosomatic symptoms as a result of not knowing the whereabouts of their pets.
- ▶ During Georgia floods in 1994, some pet owners refused to evacuate in a timely and safe manner because they could not take their pets with them. Others were prevented from attempting to rescue their pets from flooded houses using boats.
- ▶ After a propane gas spill caused by a train derailment in 1996, all citizens of Weyauwega, WI, were evacuated. Many pets and livestock were left behind. Emergency management initiated a rescue effort.

How people respond to animals in disasters

The previous table provides examples of how animal owners and care givers may respond when animals are involved in disasters. Traditional concerns involving animals during disasters include the following:

- ▶ The spoilage of the human food and water supply;
- ▶ Animal bites; and
- ▶ Outbreaks of zoonoses (diseases transmitted between animals and people) such as rabies.

Other problems include the significant impact on public mental health due to the emotions owners feel for their animals. These issues are particularly evident in seniors and children.

Mental health issues include:

- ▶ Feelings of guilt,
- ▶ Bereavement, and
- ▶ Anger.

Some people are more concerned for their animals in disasters than they are for themselves. This may impair their ability to make sensible decisions about their own safety and that of rescue workers. Examples include:

- ▶ Evacuation failures and re-entry attempts, and
- ▶ Unsafe rescue attempts.

There are also reports of pet owners being injured or killed attempting to rescue their animals from burning or flooded houses.

These behaviors are a major concern for emergency management personnel to whom saving human life is the highest priority. The new paradigm is that animals cannot be viewed simply as inanimate property.

Animal ownership

Approximately 50 percent of all U.S. households own a pet. This implies that during large-scale disasters, pet ownership may affect the behavior of large segments of the population at risk. Strong attachments also exist between farmers and their livestock. The potential magnitude of behavior-related problems is high, as shown in the following tables.

Species	Percent of U.S. households owning pets
All pets	58.9
Dogs	31.6
Cats	27.3
Birds	4.6
Horses	1.5
Other pets	10.7

Source: U.S. Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook, Center for Information Management. American Veterinary Medical Association. Schaumburg, IL. 1997

Species	Average number of pets per pet-owning household
Dogs	1.69
Cats	2.19
Birds	2.74
Horses	2.67

Source: U.S. Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook, Center for Information Management. American Veterinary Medical Association. Schaumburg, IL. 1997

The human-animal bond

The human-animal bond is a term used to describe the fundamental relationship between humans and animals. The term bonding refers to the formation of close relationships, such as those between parent and child or husband and wife. Behaviors that communicate bonding among humans are also used between humans and animals. The term human-animal bond can be applied to interactions between humans and many species, including companion animals, livestock, and wildlife. The human-animal bond involves the care for animals, and the quality of life for animals and humans.

Animals and the family

Studies show that more than 60 percent of pet owners consider their pets to be very or extremely important to their families. The majority of livestock producers have similar feelings toward their animals. The main reasons for pet ownership include:

- ▶ Personal pleasure and companionship;
- ▶ An educational experience for children (birth and death);
- ▶ Replacement of persons in their lives;
- ▶ Personal and property protection; and
- ▶ The rescue of an animal from neglect.

Livestock producers chose to support their families through the care of animals and depend on animals for their livelihood. Our nation depends on livestock producers to deliver safe, wholesome food, a healthy economy, and international trade. U.S. agricultural and domestic animal husbandry systems also contribute significantly to our country's cultural heritage and identity.

Animal care and emergency management

In disasters, some may use the way animals are cared for to measure the quality of human care provided by emergency management teams. While the care of animals in disasters should never take precedence over the care of people, providing care for animals may facilitate the personal safety and care of a large segment of the human population.

The care of animals in disasters is consistent with the American Veterinary Medical Association policy on animal welfare which states:

“Animal welfare is a human responsibility that encompasses all aspects of animal well-being, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, responsible care, humane handling, and, when necessary, humane euthanasia.”

Emergency management officials and animal-care communities should work together to define plans for the care of animals and their owners in disasters. Plans should respect the concerns of animal owners and the concerns of persons that do not own animals or have medical or psychological reasons to distance themselves from animals. Unnecessary exposure of persons with allergies or phobias against animals should be avoided. These reasons, along with food hygiene and other public health concerns, are the major reasons why animals are not allowed into human shelters.

Plans that deal with animals are also important to emergency management officials because many rescue workers will encounter animals while working in disasters. During the response, rescue workers may be pleased to find animals, but become concerned about animal care as they return to their tasks. Thus, their rescue efforts may be delayed or compromised because of their concern for the well-being of animals.

Scenarios

Let's start thinking about some emergency situations that involve animals. At this stage you are not expected to know all the answers to these questions. Although questions are given for emergency managers and owners (assume you are either an emergency manager or an owner), start thinking about how you might address solutions from the other person's point of view too. When you start to develop your community plan you may like to start with a session that tries to answer some of these questions and others from your own experience.

Scenarios

Directions: Answer the following questions in terms of: 1. What would you do to resolve these situations?, and 2. If you do not know the answers, who could help you find the answers?

1. A train carrying propane derailed and prompts the immediate evacuation of 1000 households in a 2-mile radius. You estimate that approximately 50 percent of families in the evacuation area own animals.

Emergency Managers: Do you have an action plan to evacuate people with their animals, and know where to house the animals? Describe.

Animal owners: How would you evacuate with your animals? What supplies would you take for your pets? Where would you shelter your animals?

Scenarios

2. During Hurricane Jackie many persons become separated from their horses.

Emergency Managers: How would you reunite the horses and their owners?

Animal owners: There are 35 bay mares in a temporary enclosure for horses. If one of them were yours, how would you positively identify it to a security guard at the pasture?

Scenarios

3. In a tornado, a tank of herbicide is knocked over. It may have contaminated the grain bin on a dairy farm and been sprayed onto the skin of some pigs at a neighboring farm.

Emergency Managers: What are the potential public health risks associated with contaminated livestock feed and food-producing animals?

Animal owners: Who would you contact to determine the safety of your cows' feed and to determine the potential contamination of the milk?

The pigs do not appear to be affected – Who can determine the withdrawal times for safe slaughter of the pigs for human consumption?

Scenarios

4. Many farms are in low-lying areas close to rivers. Flooding is a problem that can result in animals drowning, and difficulty in supplying feed to stranded animals.

Emergency Managers: How many farms in your community are potentially affected by floods and what types and numbers of animals do they have? How would you obtain this information?

Animal owners: How could the problem of recurrent flooding be prevented? What department in your State could help you in this regard?

Scenarios

5. During a heat wave there is a local power failure that results in the death of 500,000 chickens in two adjacent barns.

Emergency Managers: What emergency power supplies could have been mobilized and prevented this costly loss?

Animal owners: How would you dispose of this large mass of dead birds?

Scenarios

6. A brush fire precipitates the escape of a large private collection of exotic animals. The animals include lions, tigers and bears. There is great risk of people being injured. The animals are very valuable and belong to an influential local resident.

Emergency Managers: Should the escaped animals be killed or captured? Discuss.

List factors that would help you reach the most appropriate decision.

Animal owners: Whom would you call in your jurisdiction to help you with this situation?



LEARNING CHECK – WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT ANIMALS IN DISASTERS?

This activity is designed to assess your understanding of the information presented in this unit.

Directions: Answer the questions – use the Answer Key in Unit 10 to check your answers.

True or False

1. The best disaster preparedness starts with personal protection and safety.
2. Private individuals and corporations coordinate the most effective protection against disasters, without the help of Federal and State departments.
3. The U.S. animal agriculture industry generates nearly \$90 billion each year.
4. Traditional concerns involving animals in disasters include the spoilage of the human food and water supply.
5. There is no evidence to indicate that the human-animal bond affects public mental health in times of disaster.
6. Care for animals during disasters has no effect on the safety and care of humans.
7. The care of animals in disasters should take precedence over the care of people.
8. In disasters consideration has to be given to avoid unnecessary exposure of persons with allergies or phobias against animals.

Multiple Choice

9. The importance of animal ownership in the United States is evidenced by:
 - a. A decreased appreciation of pets as human companions
 - b. Increased revenue of the pet industry
 - c. An increase in the portion of the population employed in agriculture
 - d. Less than half of all Americans now own pets
10. According to survey results, what percent of pet owners consider their pets to be very or extremely important to their families?

a. 10 percent	c. 60 percent
b. 30 percent	d. 100 percent

Summary

In this unit, you examined the relationship between humans and animals and how this relationship may potentially affect emergency management. This unit described the animal-care community, examined the societal impacts of animal ownership, and introduced the concept of the human-animal bond as a major factor affecting animal owners and care providers in a disaster.

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