



ASPCA Urges Pet Owners to Plan Ahead for Disasters

New research reveals more than one-third of pet owners don't have an emergency plan

New York, NY (PRWEB) August 30, 2011

September is National Preparedness Month, and the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) urges pet owners to develop an emergency plan in advance to keep their families and pets safe as hurricane season reaches its height.

The U.S. experienced a major hurricane this past weekend, and ASPCA responders from across the country deployed to New York City to prepare for animal emergencies in anticipation of Hurricane Irene. The ASPCA helped hundreds of animals throughout the City's five boroughs, assessing the needs at evacuation centers where pets were welcomed and delivering supplies and vaccinations.

A newly released poll conducted by Lake Research Partners and commissioned by the ASPCA reveals that more than one-third (35 percent) of cat and dog owners don't have a disaster preparedness plan in place. In the Northeast, nearly half of dog owners (45 percent) and cat owners (42 percent) don't know what they would do with their pets in an evacuation, compared to less than one-third of dog owners (28 percent) and cat owners (30 percent) in the South, where hurricanes are most common.

"It doesn't matter where you live, anyone can be hit with a natural or man-made disaster," says Tim Rickey, senior director of ASPCA Field Investigations and Response and whose team was deployed to New York City in advance of the hurricane, which was downgraded to a tropical storm. "When you're in the moment, it can be very stressful for you and your pets. We learned from Hurricane Katrina that people must be allowed to evacuate with their pets, and New York City took heed and made sure that all the human shelters were pet-friendly. Having a plan in place ahead of time can save you precious time and energy, so you can focus on quickly getting you and your pets to safety."

For pet owners who have an emergency plan in place, the ASPCA's national study found that an overwhelming majority (85 percent of dog owners; 81 percent of cat owners) intend to bring their pets with them in the event of an evacuation. Rickey agrees: "If officials order an evacuation, you should take your pets with you. If it's not safe for you, then it's not safe for your pets."

The research study also found that only a quarter of dog owners (28 percent) and cat owners (24 percent) say their animals are micro-chipped. "Micro-chips can be extremely helpful in reuniting lost pets with their owners," adds Rickey, who led the relief and recovery efforts of more than 1,300 animals following the EF5 tornado that struck Joplin, Mo., in May. "The ASPCA strongly recommends pets wear collars and tags with up-to-date identification and micro-chip your pet as a more permanent form of identification."

The ASPCA offers the following tips on emergency preparedness:

- Always bring pets indoors at the first sign or warning of a storm or disaster.
- Make sure all pets wear collars and ID tags with up-to-date identification. The ASPCA also recommends micro-chipping your pet as a more permanent form of ID.
- Obtain a rescue alert sticker, which will let rescuers know that pets are inside your home.
- Keep a pet emergency kit and supplies handy with items such as medical records, water, pet food and medications, and pet first aid supplies.
- Arrange a safe haven for your pets in the event of evacuation. Do not leave your pets behind!
- Choose a designated caregiver who can take care of your pet in the event you are unable.

The ASPCA Field Investigations and Response team frequently responds to natural disasters, including major events like Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in 2008, and is commonly called upon by state and municipal governments and other animal welfare partners to lend expertise during large-scale animal rescue operations.

This year alone, the ASPCA has assisted more than 18,500 animals in communities throughout the Midwest and South that were severely affected by tornadoes, flooding and storms, and estimates that more than 600,000 cats and dogs have been affected by natural disasters nationwide.

For information on disaster preparedness and safety tips from the ASPCA, please visit <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/disaster-preparedness/>.

About the ASPCA®

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) is the first humane organization established in the Americas and serves as the nation's leading voice for animal welfare. One million supporters strong, the ASPCA's mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, the ASPCA is a national leader in the areas of anti-cruelty, community outreach and animal health services. The ASPCA, which is headquartered in New York City, offers a wide range of programs, including a mobile clinic outreach initiative, its own humane law enforcement team, and a groundbreaking veterinary forensics team and mobile animal CSI unit. For more information, please visit <http://www.asPCA.org>.

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