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Article

Pet Ownership and Evacuation Prior to Hurricane Irene

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Simple Summary: Ninety pet owners and 27 non-pet owners who lived in mandatory evacuation zones during the 2011 Hurricane Irene were surveyed about whether or not they evacuated and about their experiences during the hurricane. Although pet-ownership was not statistically associated with evacuation failure, many pet owners who chose not to evacuate still claimed that they did not evacuate because of difficulties with evacuating their pet. These findings suggest that more work needs to be done in order to make evacuating with a pet easier.

Abstract: Pet ownership has historically been one of the biggest risk factors for evacuation failure prior to natural disasters. The forced abandonment of pets during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 made national headlines and led to the passage of the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS, 2006) which mandated local authorities to plan for companion animal evacuation. Hurricane Irene hit the East Coast of the United States in 2011, providing an excellent opportunity to examine the impact of the PETS legislation on frequency and ease of evacuation among pet owners and non-pet owners. Ninety pet owners and 27 non-pet owners who lived in mandatory evacuation zones completed questionnaires assessing their experiences during the hurricane and symptoms of depression, PTSD, dissociative experiences, and acute stress. Pet ownership was not found to be a statistical risk factor for evacuation failure. However, many pet owners who failed to evacuate continue to cite pet related reasons.

Keywords: pet ownership; evacuation failure; emergency; shelter; psychopathology

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