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Americans: Make Disaster Plans for Pets, Too!

Zogby International poll in the wake of Hurricane Katrina shows majority want furry friends rescued during emergency evacuations.

A significant majority of Americans say pets should be included in rescue efforts after future natural disasters, a Zogby International poll conducted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina showed.

By a two-to-one margin (57% versus 28%) adults say that, after as many as 50,000 domesticated pets were stranded throughout the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina, official rescue efforts for disasters should include plans for rescuing man's best friends.

A similar percentage (54%) say they disagree with current American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) policies that exclude pets from rescue efforts.

That does not, however, translate into a call for government rescue of Katrina's four-legged victims. Just 4% of adults say that FEMA and other government agencies should be charged with rescuing displaced felines and canines in the wake of the Gulf storm—even when informed those pets are on the verge of dehydration or starvation. Instead, a 42% plurality say that animal welfare and animal rights groups like the Humane Society should take charge of this animal rescue effort, while nearly as many (40%) say that a combination of animal welfare groups, individual pet owners, government and private relief agencies should take up such an effort.

A big component of the public's overwhelming call for pet rescue may be found in the fact that half (49%) of all adults say they would refuse to evacuate ahead of a disaster if they could not take their pets with them.

This attitude is, unsurprisingly, more prevalent among pet owners, with 61% of this group saying they would be likely to refuse an order to evacuate. Non-pet owners are much less likely to hold this view, with just 24% saying they would refuse to leave.

But there is even a political component to this question. While Democrats would overwhelmingly refuse to evacuate—55% take this position—this is a minority view among Republicans, with 39% saying they would stay behind. Among independents, 53% would refuse to evacuate.

The Zogby Interactive poll of 3,185 adults nationwide was conducted from September 13 to 15, 2005. The margin of error is +/- 1.8 percentage points.

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