Personal Pet Issues in a Disaster

Center for Biopreparedness Education

Elaine Lust, PharmD
Associate Professor, Creighton University
School of Pharmacy and Health Professions
Department of Pharmacy Practice

Pharmacist, VMAT-5
Iowa Veterinary Rapid Response Team
Nebraska Livestock Emergency Disease Response System (LEDRS)
Learning Objectives

1. Describe the challenges associated with pet issues in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005

2. Identify issues applicable to pets during times of disasters

3. List 3 things that pet owners can do to prepare their pets for a disaster
VMAT = Veterinary Medical Assistant Team. Under Dept. Homeland Security, FEMA, National Disaster Medical System. 60 Human disaster teams, 10 Mortuary service teams, 4 Veterinary teams.

VMATs are teams of highly trained veterinarians, veterinary technicians and pharmacists supported by FEMA and the American Veterinary Medical Association.

When deployed we become federalized.

Typically serve 14 days.

You must “be prepared” to “be prepared”
What is a VMAT?

- Deployed to provide veterinary medical treatment and address animal and public health issues resulting from natural, man-made, or any other type of disasters.

- VMATs are available to assist the federal and states

- Must receive an invitation from the affected state in order to be deployed.
Timeline of Events

- Put on alert for Hurricane Katrina on Saturday, August 27th
- Activated on Sunday, August 28th. Traveled to Memphis, then to Dallas, then on to Baton Rouge, LA on Sept 1st.
- I was gone from home for 19 days
- Many from my team spent 3+ weeks deployed
- VMAT operations continued thru December 2005
While in Dallas....
Baton Rouge, LA

- September 1, 2005 drove to Baton Rouge, LA to the campus of LSU.
- Toured human ambulatory and critical care areas, heli-pad, received and treated 15,000 people, security issues
- Stayed in the student recreation center
- September 2nd and 3rd – assessments of the veterinary and ag infrastructure in parish’s N and NE New Orleans area
- Other skill sets proved critical: navigation, GPS, emotional intelligence, communication skills, urgent problem solving, resource acquisition
- Communication was very, very poor
Heli-Lifting Human Patients
Home Sweet Home
Rural Assessments
Rural Assessments
Rural Assessments

STOP UNKNOWS
WILL BE KILLED
NEED DOG FOOD
VMAT at the Airport
VMAT at the Airport
VMAT at the Airport
VMAT at the Airport
Lamar-Dixon

- September 5, 2005 VMAT-5 was tasked to Lamar Dixon Equine Expo in Gonzales, LA about 20 miles south of Baton Rouge. Continued until October 15th.

- Very, very large horse show facility, numerous indoor arenas, outdoor arenas, 6 barns for horses.

- Served as the staging areas for sheriff/police units

- Animal care people were the only ones not wearing guns

- Hundreds of volunteers from local community, HSUS, LA SPCA
Lamar-Dixon

- Lamar-Dixon eventually housed 8000+ animals. Dogs, cats, reptiles, pocket pets, horses, mules, donkeys.

- VMAT set up the largest veterinary field hospital and pharmacy in US history

- We did get our federal drug cache, never got anything else. No supplies, equipment, tent…nothing

- Relied HEAVILY on donations from veterinarians, vet schools and animal health companies
Lamar-Dixon
Lamar-Dixon

- Provided all drugs, doses, dosage forms, drug information to vets and vet techs
- Administer meds triaging and assessments
- Became a walking-talking inventory, supply items
- Numerous therapeutic substitutions
- Record keeping
Lamar-Dixon

Pharmacy at Lamar Dixon
Lamar-Dixon
Lamar-Dixon

Treatment rooms and pharmacy
Boots on the Ground
Boots on the Ground

Female pointer with severe traumatic injury to rear left leg
Boots on the Ground
Boots on the Ground
Deployment Realities

- Be very flexible and adaptable
- Accept what you can not change or control
- Self-reliance is critical
- Bring/wear comfortable shoes
- Disaster work is neither comfortable nor glamorous
Boots on the Ground
Boots on the Ground

Patients of all kinds
Trailer Full of Dogs
Trailer Full of Dogs
Trailer Full of Dogs
Lots of Volunteers
Lots of Volunteers
Lots of Volunteers
Lots of Volunteers
Deployment Realities

- Learn to manage large numbers of volunteers
- Be cautious of untrained volunteers
- Welcome volunteers that can feed you – God Bless the Baptists!
- Learn to be creative and resourceful
Lamar-Dixon
Lamar-Dixon
Lamar-Dixon
Lots of Pit Bulls
Lots of Pit Bulls
Lots of Pit Bulls
Lots of Pit Bulls
Deployment Realities

- Disaster learning curve is very steep
- ICS is very structured. Independent thought is not always appreciated.
- Realize that disasters do not have a 8am-5pm work day
- Accept that personal down time is often limited
Deployment Realities

- Support your team members – laundry, food, money
- Stealing
- Seen so many people (strangers) in their underwear
- Acute changes in vocabulary
Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act)

- In order to qualify for FEMA funding, a city/state is required to submit a plan detailing its disaster preparedness program.

- This Act would require that the State/local authorities include how they will accommodate households with pets or service animals.
Take-Home Points

- Animal Identification is critical - pets and livestock (tags, microchip, collars)

- Disaster plan for companion animals (food, leash, kennel, vet name and #)

- Parallel shelters – likely the future
Veterinary Disaster Resources

- VMAT teams thru the American Veterinary Medical Association. Must be requested/invited.

- Nebraska Livestock Emergency Disease Response System (LEDRS) - NE Dept Agriculture. State asset.

- National Veterinary Response Teams with the National Disaster Medical System. Federal asset, must be requested/invited.
Any Questions?