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## LESSON LEARNED

### Mass Care Response: Pet Shelter Co-Location with Human Shelters

#### SUMMARY

The After Action Report / Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) from the response to the June 2011 tornadoes in Massachusetts revealed that responders did not locate pet shelters near human shelters, creating distress for individuals with pets. The AAR/IP recommended that decision-makers plan to co-locate pet and human shelters or plan for a way to transport people to pet shelters. The AAR/IP also recommended pet shelter planning efforts include improving awareness of available resources, such as local Disaster Animal Response Teams' (DART) capabilities.

#### DESCRIPTION

On June 1, 2011, several tornadoes struck the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts, killing 4 people, injuring more than 200, and damaging or destroying more than 1,400 homes. The damage prompted Governor Deval L. Patrick to declare a state of emergency. The destruction from the tornadoes resulted in 628 people displaced, requiring services in seven shelters across central and western Massachusetts. The tornadoes also resulted in a large number of pets requiring shelter.<sup>1</sup>



FEMA partners, Guardians of Rescue, are providing assistance to residents and pet owners of Staten Island, NY, who were affected by Hurricane Sandy.

Source: FEMA Multimedia Library

A number of national, state, and local agencies and organizations participated in response operations following the tornadoes. This included personnel from the Massachusetts' Medical Reserve Corps, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Springfield Christian Ministries, and local DARTs. The *June 1, 2011 Tornado Response: After Action Report and Improvement Plan* (AAR/IP) included feedback from stakeholders in these organizations, most notably from the local DARTs and operators of both human and animal shelters.<sup>2</sup>

Co-locating human shelters with pet shelters and maintaining awareness of available resources to operate these shelters is an important consideration. The AAR/IP noted that pet and human shelters were too far apart in response to the June 1, 2011 tornadoes in

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Massachusetts. The AAR/IP also highlighted that this issue could be corrected in future disasters with improved planning and situational awareness of available resources.<sup>3</sup>

### CO-LOCATION OF PET AND HUMAN SHELTERS

A pet shelter set up within the Dakin Animal Shelter contained adequate staff and resources to accommodate pets sheltered in response to the tornadoes. Shelter staff ensured pets sheltered from the tornados were not co-mingled with animals that normally resided at the shelter. However, the pet shelter was not close enough to the human shelter for people to visit their pets. A prolonged separation can cause distress in pet owners within shelters because pet owners often consider their pets as "children."<sup>4</sup>

Awareness of available resources is important in planning for the location of pet shelters. The AAR/IP noted that staff at the human shelter would not allow a DART member to build a temporary pet shelter outside of the human shelter due to concerns that the pet shelter would damage and compromise the sanitation of the human shelter.<sup>3</sup> DART teams are trained and resourced to establish pet shelters that would neither damage shelters nor create any unsanitary conditions. Staff at the human shelter were unaware of these DART capabilities; therefore, they did not allow DART members to construct a co-located pet shelter.<sup>4</sup>

**Additional Pet Shelter Resources:**  
*Pet Sheltering:* [Joplin, Missouri's Establishment of an Emergency Shelter After the May 22, 2011, Tornado](#)  
*Mass Evacuation:* [Providing Muzzles and Pet Carriers at Evacuation Hubs](#)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The *June 1, 2011 Tornado Response: AAR/IP* recommends Mass Care response planners pre-designate co-located or nearly co-located pet and human shelters. If co-location is not possible, shelter staff should include periodic transportation for people to visit their pets.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the AAR/IP recommends that pre-designated shelter operators and staff be made aware of DART capabilities in advance of any response. This awareness should specifically include that DART members have the expertise and resources to establish pet shelters near human shelters without damaging host buildings or compromising the sanitation of the human shelter.<sup>6</sup>

### CITATIONS

<sup>1</sup> Western Massachusetts Homeland Security Advisory Council and the Central Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, *June 1, 2011 Tornado Response: After Action Report and Improvement Plan*. January 8, 2012. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/june-1-2011-tornado-response-central-and-western-massachusetts>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.