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PRACTICE NOTE

Pet Sheltering: Joplin, Missouri's, Establishment of an Emergency Shelter After the May 22, 2011, Tornado

PRACTICE

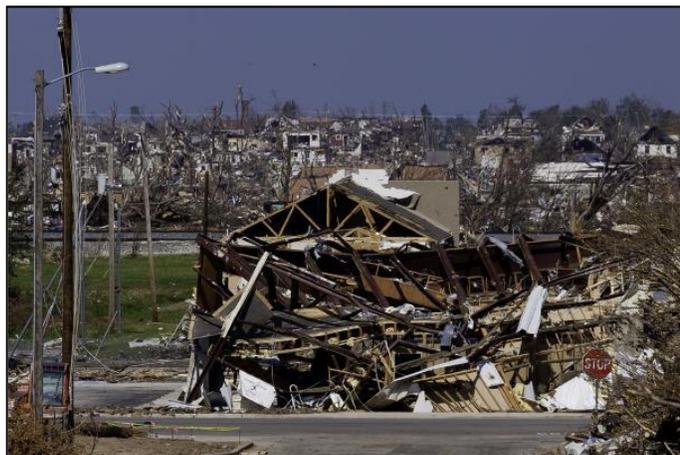
The Joplin Humane Society (JHS) and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) established an emergency shelter for abandoned and orphaned pets after an Enhanced Fujita (EF)-5 tornado struck the city on May 22, 2011. The shelter provided a safe environment for the animals until they could be reunited with their owners or be adopted.

DESCRIPTION

On Sunday, May 22, 2011, cold and warm fronts clashed throughout the central United States, creating a supercell thunderstorm that generated several tornadoes, wind damage, and flash flooding across southwest Missouri. The National Weather Service Forecast Office in Springfield, MO, issued a tornado warning for Joplin at 5:17 p.m. Central Daylight Time (CDT), providing residents with 24 minutes of warning of the tornado. At 5:41 p.m. CDT, the $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile-wide EF-5 tornado touched down in Joplin with winds in excess of 200 mph and moved through the city at less than 20 mph. The path of the entire tornado was 22.1 miles long and up to 1 mile in width.

The city of Joplin is located in Jasper County, Missouri, in the southwest corner of the state near Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Joplin has a population of 49,024; the Joplin metropolitan area has a population of 400,000, making it Missouri's fourth largest metropolitan area.

The tornado resulted in catastrophic loss of life and destruction during its 6-mile track through Joplin. The tornado caused 161 fatalities and approximately 1,371 injuries as of May 27, 2011, making it the single deadliest U.S. tornado since 1947. The EF-5 tornado destroyed 4,380 homes, damaged an additional 3,884, and impacted other structures, including St. John's Regional Medical Center, the Home Depot, and Wal-Mart. Eight schools in the area suffered structural damage, while two others suffered minor damage. Additionally, the tornado caused the loss of 130 transmission poles and power



Tornado Destruction in Joplin

outages that left approximately 18,000 customers without power. The area impacted by the tornado spanned nearly 30 percent of Joplin and generated an estimated 3 million cubic yards of debris.

Establishing and Operating the Emergency Shelter

The tornado displaced more than 1,300 pets, overwhelming the JHS's permanent pet shelter, which has a maximum capacity of approximately 200 pets. The JHS staff recognized the need to augment their existing shelter resources and capabilities to meet the needs of the displaced pets. On May 24, 2011, the JHS and the ASPCA collaborated to establish an emergency shelter for pets that could not be accommodated in the JHS's permanent pet shelter. JHS and ASPCA personnel established the shelter in three vacant warehouses adjacent to the JHS. Shelter staff initially anticipated that one warehouse would be sufficient to shelter the displaced pets.

During the first 24 to 36 hours after the tornado, the shelter received animals at a manageable rate for the staff. Mutual aid responders and volunteers began arriving in Joplin in much larger numbers approximately 48 hours after the tornado. These individuals found injured, abandoned, or lost pets and brought them to the emergency shelter. This resulted in long lines of people waiting to deliver pets. Consequently, staff expanded the emergency shelter into two additional warehouses. Staff members placed pets in either the JHS permanent shelter or the emergency shelter depending on their medical condition. Injured pets were placed in the JHS permanent shelter where they received veterinary care, while the emergency shelter housed uninjured pets.

Emergency pet shelter staff relied upon local volunteers and donations for shelter operations. The ASPCA provided nearly 100 volunteer staff members to address immediate shelter needs. As the population at the shelter continued to increase in the days and weeks after the tornado, volunteers from other organizations, such as the American Humane Association, RedRover, and the Humane Society of the United States, arrived to assist with operations. In addition, volunteer veterinarians from the area worked 24-hour shifts to provide care to injured pets.



Rescued Dogs at the Joplin Shelter

Donations were also critical to the success of the emergency shelter. The JHS lacked the necessary supplies to properly care for all of the pets. Companies donated medical supplies, pet food, nursing supplies, biscuits, toys, and blankets for the effort.

Emergency shelter staff employed the ASPCA animal shelter standard operating procedures to track incoming pets. The staff created a card for each pet that included an identification number and information about when it arrived and where it was found. Shelter staff photographed each pet and included the pet's information card in the photograph. This ensured that the pet's photograph and information card could not be separated. In addition, each pet received a collar to ensure the accurate identification of each pet.

Reunification

Emergency shelter staff took several steps to reunite pets with their owners. Staff members posted photographs of the pets on the JHS Web site. ASPCA personnel also spoke on local radio programs to inform Joplin residents of the emergency shelter. Finally, shelter personnel posted signs in the Joplin area directing people who lost their pets to come to the JHS shelter and the emergency shelter. By July 12, 2011, shelter personnel reunited more than 500 pets with their owners.

Adoption

The JHS and the ASPCA held a major adoption event on June 25 and 26, 2011, for nearly 600 pets in need of permanent homes. Veterinary staff microchipped, vaccinated, and spayed or neutered all pets in preparation for the event. Due to the large number of pets available for adoption, the ASPCA and the JHS created a plan to manage the large crowds and to prevent a stressful environment for the pets. The JHS pre-approved a limited number of people to adopt a pet before the Adoption Fair began.

On each day of the fair, people interested in adopting a pet received a number that determined when they could enter the shelter. This limited the number of people who could be within the shelter during the Adoption Fair at the same time. When people entered the fair, they completed an informational form and expressed their interest in adopting either a cat or a dog. To ensure proper placement of pets with new owners, veterinarians and animal behaviorists discussed the special medical and behavioral needs of the animals with attendees. Shelter staff provided pets and their new owners with a collar, leash, personalized identification tag, and goodie bag.

Attendees adopted approximately half of the pets on the first day of the fair. The success of the event allowed the JHS to also offer animals from other local shelters for adoption at the Adoption Fair. On June 30, Missouri State Emergency Management Agency Emergency Support Function 11 personnel announced a successful adoption event, resulting in a 100% adoption rate. A total of 739 pets found homes as a result of the fair.

Overall, the establishment of an emergency pet shelter during the Joplin response illustrates the effective implementation of a Whole Community solution during disaster response operations. This experience validated concepts and objectives that had been exercised only days earlier as part of National Level Exercise 2011 (NLE 11).

NLE 11 was conducted 1 week prior to the Joplin tornado. Part of NLE 11 exercised jurisdictions' use of the Whole Community approach to emergency management. One mass care core capability objective for NLE 11 was to "Provide household pet and service animal support for transportation, sheltering, and care (e.g., feeding, hydration, veterinary care)." For more on NLE 11, please see the NLE 11 Whole Community Quick Look Report.

CITATIONS

Bueller, Lysa. Shelter Manager, Joplin Humane Society. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 06 Oct 2011.

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<http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2011/06/27/pets-displaced-by-joplin-tornado-find-new-homes/>

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