

The Wake of Reform

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In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, pet owners watched appalling images on national television of emaciated pets left behind because their owners weren't permitted to evacuate with them. While the collection of abandoned pets continues even today, Americans ask what can be done to prevent this from happening again.

Former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, says the key to averting a similar tragedy is people becoming involved. He's the founder of the Center for Health Transformation (CHT), and he believes there is definitely a place for a pet evacuation plan. CHT accelerates the adoption of transformational solutions and policies for better health and more choices at a lower cost.

Such tragic scenes were common in the aftermath of Katrina, as evacuees were forced to leave behind their animal companions, he says. The emotional impact of being forced to abandon forever ones cherished best friend is likely to be both dramatic and long-term. Its something we can't ignore.

Some of the animals left behind were service animals and guide dogs belonging to visually impaired individuals.

Gingrich adds, In the aftermath of Katrina many people refused to leave their homes if they were required to leave their animals behind. So, prohibiting pet evacuation ended up endangering the lives of people as well as their pets.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), no one knows exactly how many people refused to evacuate because they were forbidden to take their pets. It also has no way of estimating the number of pets left behind when people made the difficult choice to flee without them. The ASPCA estimates that prior to the disaster, 230,000 cats and 205,000 dogs lived in the 90,000 square miles of the hurricane-affected area. Since mid-December 2005, more than 200 humane organizations rescued about 15,000 animals. Sadly, only 360 reunions pet-owner could be celebrated.

Many of the survivors of Katrina have lost their homes, their jobs and, in many cases, their loved ones, Gingrich says. Its time for us to step in to ensure that those who have lost everything are not forced, in their darkest and most desperate moments, to abandon their pets as well.