

Disaster Animal Response Team to Assist in California Wildfire Rescue

Los Angeles Fire Department requests the help of spcaLA with animal relief.

Posted: Oct. 14, 2008, 3 a.m. EDT

With the arrival of California's fire season, firefighters are already working on several blazes, including the Marek/Little Tujunga Fire that forced thousands of people from their homes. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles and its Disaster Animal Response Team, or DART, was dispatched Monday to the Marek fire at the request of the Los Angeles Fire Department to help with animal relief efforts, said spcaLA spokesman Mark Cirillo.

The DART team, fresh off its efforts in Texas after Hurricane Ike, will provide rescue and relief for the cat and dog victims of the fire and be ready for any new fires that start to burn. The team is prepared to provide veterinary relief for burns and smoke inhalation, said Madeline Bernstein, spcaLA president.

DART, equipped with a full communications system capable of monitoring and dispatching emergency services, will also be assisting with temporary shelter for pets. In addition, the team will help local, state and national agencies to assist families and their new animals with medical, food and housing needs. Pet owners are being urged to take precautions in case of an emergency to ensure the safety of the entire family, including pets. The following guidelines are offered by spcaLA to protect pets from heat and natural disasters. Keep a supply of canned/dry pet food and bottled water with other emergency provisions, including pet prescriptions and medicine. Include a muzzle in your emergency safety kit. State-sponsored rescue efforts will often not allow dogs on public evacuation transportation without a muzzle. If roads are blocked, professional help may not arrive immediately, so it's best to familiarize your family with pet resuscitation and general first aid procedures. Avoid displaying stress and anxiety when dealing with pets because most animals are aware of their owners' emotions. Pets that are otherwise calm can display aggressive behavior if they sense stress in owners. After a fire, check pet structures and favorite hiding places for hazardous debris. Ask your local fire department, animal shelter or veterinarian for a "Pet Alert" sign for doors and windows. If unavailable, make your own signs by listing your pets on 3-by-5-inch cards and displaying them prominently. This alerts emergency teams that there may be pets that need help. Dogs and cats should wear identification tags with updated address and/or phone number at all times. Keep current on your pet's vaccinations. Pets may become disoriented and stray, or be housed in shelters with other animals, so they potentially can be exposed to diseases. Alert local shelters immediately upon discovering that a pet is lost.