

## Rescue Teams Assist Animal Victims of California Fires

### Cats and dogs temporarily housed at shelters throughout the region.

Posted: Nov. 19, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

A Disaster Animal Response Team worker surveys a smoky scene in Southern California. The recent wildfires in Southern California have forced thousand to flee their homes, and animal welfare organizations are assisting with moving cats and dogs out of danger.

At the request of state authorities, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles dispatched its Disaster Animal Response Team to the Sayre fire near Sylmar and the Freeway Complex Fire that originated in Orange County. The DART unit provides temporary housing, food and medical care to animals.

In addition, a mobile kennel has been set up at Sylmar High School, and small pets can be taken to the Mission animal shelter. As of early this week, Los Angeles Animal Services reported evacuation information from the following shelters: Mission Shelter  
85 dogs, 43 cats, five birds, two snakes, nine rats, three rabbits and a chinchilla. West Valley (Chatsworth) Animal Shelter  
10 cats, five dogs. Pierce College  
17 horses, capacity is about 200. Sylmar High School  
16 dogs, 15 cats, capacity is about 40.

The spcaLA urges pet owners to prepare for an emergency by following guidelines to ensure the safety of their animals in the event of an urgent situation or natural disaster. Some general recommendations: Keep a supply of canned/dry pet food and bottled water with other emergency provisions including pet prescriptions and medicine. For dogs, include a muzzle since some state/federal rescue operations require them if you use their services to evacuate. If roads are blocked, professional help may not be possible immediately so familiarize yourself and other family members with pet CPR, resuscitation and general first aid procedures. Quick action could save a pet's life. Try not to display stress and anxiety when dealing with pets. Most animals are aware of their owner's emotions and can read signs of stress. This can cause otherwise calm pets to display aggressive behavior. Continuously check pet structures and favorite hiding places for hazardous debris.

Dogs and cats should wear I.D. tags with updated address and/or phone number at all times, in addition to being microchipped. This will make it easier for people and pets to be reunited. Keep pets up-to-date on vaccinations. Pets may become disoriented and stray or become housed in shelters with other animals, potentially becoming exposed to infectious diseases. Alert local shelters immediately upon discovering that a pet is lost. Ask your local fire department, animal shelter or veterinarian for a "Pet Alert" sign for doors and windows or make your own by listing your pets on 3x5 cards and display them prominently.

From now through Nov. 30, VCA Animal Hospitals throughout Southern California are offering free boarding for companion animals whose families were evacuated or displaced as a result of the fires. Boarding assistance for pets is based on space availability at individual locations.

"As families are being evacuated to shelters or facing the loss of their homes, VCA hopes to ease their burden by offering free boarding for pets so they can focus on the critical issues with their families and homes," said Art Antin, chief operating officer of VCA Animal Hospitals.