

## Team Effort to Improve Animal Emergency Response

**Vet groups partner with Red Cross to provide assistance to cats, dogs and other pets at local, national levels.**

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Thousands of cats, dogs, animals and livestock get separated from their owners during a major natural disaster, according to the AVMA. The American Veterinary Medical Association and its charitable branch, the American Veterinary Medical Foundation, recently signed an agreement with the American Red Cross to coordinate animal-rescue efforts and programs.

The national groups have had a statement of understanding since 1998, but this formal agreement, called a memorandum of understanding, lays the groundwork for increased cooperation between them.

“This partnership with the Red Cross will help American Veterinary Medical Foundation bring substantive help to pets and animals not only on the national level but at the local level,” said Michael Cathey, head of the AVMF. “It gives us a hands-on network of people who will work around our goal of helping pets in times of disaster. This is an exciting new chapter in the AVMF’s outreach efforts.”

The AVMF will help fund programs developed under the agreement through AVMF grants. The AVMA will serve as a technical adviser to the Red Cross on all animal and veterinary-related aspects of disaster-response efforts.

About 100,000 animals, pets and livestock are separated from their owners and/or lost during a major natural disaster such as a hurricane, fire or flood, according to AVMA. Many times pet owners are forced to leave their pets behind because they haven’t prepared for evacuation. In other cases, pet owners have been prepared but local or state disaster plans have not been written to accommodate for the evacuation of animals. One of the group’s goals is to reverse this trend.

The Chicago chapter of the Red Cross and the AVMA are already working together to find temporary housing for pets after house fires. The new program, still under development, will create a network of local veterinarians that would house animals that were victims of a house fire. The hope is that such a program will be duplicated across the country.