

Chinese Officials Cancel Animal Cull in Earthquake Zone

Animal welfare organization supplies food and vaccinations.

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Posted: June 9, 2008 2 a.m. EDT

A cat stands on the rubble of an earthquake-ravaged building in Zun Dao, China. An agreement was reached to end the killing of thousands of animals in earthquake-devastated China after International Fund for Animal Welfare rescue leaders met with government officials in the Zun Dao township.

Authorities called off the "collective" culling of dogs that was ordered in May after the 7.9 magnitude earthquake. Instead, the government recently announced an effort to address public health concerns through an IFAW-sponsored anti-rabies vaccination and veterinary aid program in the southwest province of Sichuan.

Earthquake victims and pets wait for aid in Zun Dao, China. The majority of the rescue work to date has involved dogs, but that's only because there have not been as many encounters with cats, said IFAW spokesman Chris Cutter. The work for all companion animals involves small teams of people going out on foot to patrol small villages and help whatever affected animals they find, he said. This includes setting up food stations for roaming or stray cats and dogs.

IFAW volunteers provide food and veterinary care for companion animals. After the earthquake that claimed an estimated 80,000 human lives, IFAW sent more than six tons of animal food for some of the hardest-hit areas. The animal welfare organization met with Chinese officials in Zun Dao and offered humane alternatives to deal with the spread of disease.

Officials agreed to halt any culling operations in the area and are welcoming efforts to address health concerns by conducting anti-rabies vaccinations and veterinary care programs. More relief efforts are expected in the coming days to increase the amount of aid for animals and people in the earthquake region.

"This agreement is a major breakthrough," said Jackson Zee, IFAW rescue leader. "Chinese media have been filled with reports of people evacuating with their pets, being comforted by their pets, and even saved by their pets after their homes collapsed, so we are delighted to see this next step as local officials are acknowledging that humane care of dogs, cats and livestock can benefit both animals and people."