

For Immediate Release:

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ESF-11 Partners Stage Pet Transport Exercise

BATON ROUGE, La – September 8, 2006 – In preparation for what could be the largest planned pet evacuation ever undertaken, LA Emergency Support Function-11 public and private partners staged a mock pet evacuation exercise at Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson and at East Baton Rouge Animal Control Center yesterday. The cooperative effort focused on staging, loading and securing transport vehicles to ensure pets can be safely moved to shelters during an emergency.

Non-profit humane organizations LA/SPCA (www.la-sPCA.org), Muttsack (www.muttshack.org) and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW, www.ifaw.org) provided transport vehicles, support personnel and technical expertise for the exercise. Kennels were measured, placed and secured in several types of transport vehicles that will be used for evacuation. The number, placement and configuration of kennels were evaluated for safety and efficiency. Events were videotaped so “Standard Operating Procedures” can be produced and distributed to pet evacuation officials throughout Louisiana and the nation.

Heat stress is a major concern when transporting pets long distances. Veterinarians from the USDA’s Animal Care team provided infrared thermometers and monitored air temperatures in the transport vehicles during loading and transport. Animal Health Services officials from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry were on hand fulfilling part of their role as lead state agency for animal care and agriculture during a disaster.

“By establishing a comprehensive evacuation, rescue and shelter plan, Louisiana now leads the nation in caring for pets before, during and after a disaster,” Commissioner of Agriculture & Forestry Bob Odom said. “The expertise of all the groups involved in this drill and the entire process will ensure the safety and well-being of Louisiana’s animal population. I commend their efforts to practice and re-evaluate before a disaster strikes.”

FEMA Special Liaison for Animal Issues at the Baton Rouge Joint Field Office, Captain Stephanie Ostrowski, DVM, agrees. “Formal integration of federal and state plans and resources to support pet evacuation and sheltering is a new concept. This exercise is an important first step in cooperative planning.”

Department of Corrections inmates at DCI pre-assembled and labeled transport kennels for the exercise. In a true emergency, Corrections has volunteered to perform this function as well as to house up to 2,000 pets of disabled, elderly and special needs residents.

Following the kennel configuration exercise, the team traveled to Baton Rouge, where adoptable pets at East Baton Rouge Animal Control Center served as volunteers for a mock drill of a parish pick-up point. Parish pick-up points are designated locations in coastal parishes where citizens requiring assisted evacuation can assemble. Their pets can be safely evacuated by animal officials at the same time, reducing the chances they will be lost. “Pet ownership is a responsibility, and families should include pets in their evacuation plans. But when people have no other option for evacuation, hopefully this will prevent them from leaving their pets behind,” said Hilton Cole, Director of the EBR Animal Control Center. “Owners should place identification tags on their pet’s collar and bring proof of rabies vaccination to pick-up points,” Cole also recommended.

The pet transportation exercise was coordinated by the U. S. Department of Homeland Security, the Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry and the Louisiana State Animal Response Team, a volunteer organization charged by the Department of Agriculture & Forestry with facilitating pet evacuation and shelter as an ESF-11 partner. Dr. Renee Poirrier, a Louisiana veterinarian and LSART team leader, summed up the exercise by saying, “This drill exemplifies the cooperative effort between partners at the federal, state and local level necessary to ensure that pets are safely evacuated. And when pets are evacuated, more people will evacuate. That’s the bottom line.”



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