

# **Developing a Rutgers Community Animal Response Team**

## **Working in Conjunction with Middlesex CART Utilizing an Internet-Based Sharing Site to Engage Animal Response Team Members**

**Tag Words:** Disaster Preparedness, Animals in Disasters, Rutgers University Community, Community Exchange, Middlesex County NJ Strong, Middlesex CART

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### **Summary**

Disaster can strike at anytime. It is important to have a plan in place in order to ensure the safety of all humans and animals affected during these stressful times. We have created a Rutgers University Community Animal Response Team (RUCART) that will consist of trained volunteers with the goal of helping animals and their owners in a time of disaster. Our goal is to educate the general public on the necessity and procedure for disaster planning, as well as the deployment of volunteers to help in the event of a disaster. By working together, we will be able to make a difference in our own community.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/Ghg5MbRc3xQ>

### **The Issue: Preparing for emergencies. What to do with animals in the event of an emergency?**

If you were forced to evacuate your home now, do you know exactly what to do with your beloved furry friends? Many people do not have a plan in place which leads to chaos and rash, uneducated decisions that may be detrimental to your pet's health and safety. Not having a plan can have devastating circumstances. When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2007, many were unprepared and families lost their beloved furry friends. Before the hurricane struck it was estimated that 259,400 families had at least one pet. About 104,000 pets were left behind. On top of that, 88,700 are still unaccounted for and believed to have died in the storm. Only 15,000 were rescued and of the 15,000 only 3,000 were reunited with their families. That means that only about 1% were actually reunited with their families after the storm. Today, there are still animals from the storm that have been left unclaimed, living their lives out in a shelter (1).

In today's world, most people value their pets as family and because of this, families sometimes will not leave their pets even when told to evacuate their homes. In a survey conducted by the American Animal Hospital Association, they found that, "56% of respondents would risk their lives to save their pets". During hurricane Katrina, the lack of inclusion of pets in evacuation plans resulted in 50% of families not evacuating (2).

In Ohio, 114 animal care agencies were contacted about their emergency preparedness. Out of those 114 agencies, only 56 of them stated that they had been in contact with emergency preparedness groups. Some of the groups that they were in contact with included the American Red Cross, Disaster Assistance and Rescue teams, County Emergency Management Agencies, County Emergency Management Departments and Community Emergency Response Teams.

Just under half (47%) of these agencies contacted had a plan of how to respond in a disaster while 24% reported to having never even touched the subject. The others were somewhere in the middle of the process of developing a plan (2). Although the numbers are getting better, there are still many animal organizations that have no plans for emergencies. Therefore, although jump started following Hurricane Katrina, many animal agencies still had a lot more preparation to do before they could consider themselves ready to handle an emergency.

The ASPCA also works to be prepared for disasters. After Hurricane Sandy, the ASPCA was prepared and immediately sent out first responders on the ground. They conducted a water and land search and rescue. They also set up an emergency boarding facility with a grant provided by Rachael Ray (3). Although the ASPCA was able to step up, many smaller shelters were overrun. The high volume of displaced animals was difficult to keep up with.

Following the recovery phase after Hurricane Katrina, a retrospective analysis was done, which showed that many organizations were not prepared to accept pets in a time of disaster (2). This led to the development of the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act) of 2006. This act stated that in order for a state government to receive FEMA funding for disaster relief plans, companion and assistance animals must be included in those plans (2).

#### **Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act)**

After Hurricane Katrina struck it was clear that many aspects of disaster relief could have been handled more efficiently. The Department of Homeland Security created a list of lessons learned from the hurricane. After the review of the list, congress passed the PETS act. The purpose of this act is to ensure that families with pets and service animals will have somewhere to bring their pet during disasters instead of trying to ride out the storm with them. The PETS act authorized FEMA to allow the usage of resources to care for family pets. Funding is available in order to cover the cost of animal care (4).

#### **CARTs and SARTs programs**

In order to ensure safety, local county and state agencies are now available to respond in the event of an emergency. For example, the Middlesex County Health Department, local to Rutgers University in New Brunswick NJ, can be contacted during an emergency to ensure human safety. They have a preparedness division that is trained to act in emergency for the wellbeing of the human population (5). New Brunswick Animal control works towards the safety of humans and animals in the local area. They can trap animals themselves in humane ways as well as lend traps to residents. They work in both New Brunswick and North Brunswick (6). State office of Emergency Management can be contacted to activate Emergency Operation Center. Unlike some other states, Pennsylvania being one (see PA SART), the state of New Jersey does not yet have a State Animal Response Team (SART). Instead, NJ relies solely on County Animal Response Teams or CARTS. In the event that the emergency is beyond the capacities/capabilities of the CARTS, the State Office of Emergency Management will step in and activate teams as directed by the NJDA - Division of Animal Health as of where to respond (7). Middlesex County Cart can be contacted to provide guidance and supply equipment and manpower. Humane Society and ASPCA can be contacted on matters that are beyond their capacity and issues that CARTS cannot handle on their own. Private farms, kennels and stables can be contacted to request them to provide shelter and holding areas for displaced animals during a time of need.

Local Veterinary Clinics can be asked to provide veterinary care if needed. Alone people struggle, but if everyone works together in a time of need, a strong impact can be made.

### **Systematic approach to emergency planning**

To adequately respond in an emergency, disaster planning experts have broken emergency planning down into five phases; these include planning, preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery (8).

The first is **planning**. It is considered the most important stage of emergency management because it can have substantial effect on all the other stages. In order to properly plan for these emergency situations, one needs to prioritize the likelihood of specific events and be realistic when determining the capabilities the response team has. Decisions to probable situations need to be discussed in advance to avoid rash actions in the middle of disaster. Planning ahead can help with mitigation by assigning roles to responders and making sure adequate resources will be available. Planning also makes a group more prepared to tackle the situation at hand. With proper planning, volunteers can be trained in how to handle specific issues they may encounter; which in turn makes the entire response team more capable in emergency situations. With a plan, responders will be able to effectively work through a disaster and the time needed for response and recovery will be shortened making the process run more smoothly. If it is previously decided what locations will house animals and where the resources will be obtained, this will make a chaotic situation much less stressful and will allow for a response team to act more efficiently. In turn, if the disaster situation is handled calmly and effectively, the recovery process will go smoother. Planning ahead for potential impact can allow us to be ready to recover for difficult situations.

**Preparedness** is a part of the management scheme that involves all parties, including the general public. “Preparedness involves training, exercising, and credentialing responders, as well as creating public awareness that empowers individuals to care for themselves and their dependents” (8). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has set up guidelines and minimum training qualifications that all first responders must meet in order to ensure individuals are properly prepared. As well as general first responder courses, there are animal-related courses that must be completed. Once volunteers have been properly trained, they will be better prepared to help the community in a team situation.

It is important for the general public to be prepared as well. Each home should have an evacuation plan for the humans and animals alike that occupy that residence. Awareness of what to do in the event of an emergency will enable families to know where they can leave their pets if needed. As well what family members they can contact during these situations. The evacuation plans should be share with and practiced will all members of the family including children and pets. Local Community Animal Response Teams should provide guidance on this matter.

**Mitigation** includes things such as proposing transportation routes, acquiring specialized equipment, and determines shelter locations for displaced animals. It also includes legislation relating to the situation, regulation and enforcement. To avoid mitigation issues minimal animal care standards must be set and means to accomplish these standards must be obtained. Things such as windbreaks to protect livestock and flood-plans for areas below sea level are things that need to be considered. The Pet Evacuation and Transportation Act is a piece of legislation that

discusses the needs of individual with pets or service animal before, during and after a disaster. This act had FEMA grant funds to each state to help with animal emergency preparedness purposes. As a county we learn from our mistakes. “Coincidental with the passing of this law and the recovery from Hurricane (in 2005) many States have greatly increased the use of federal FEMA preparedness grant funding for activities involving animals” (8). It took a disaster to show us how important planning is and hopefully that lesson was fully learned.

The response phase of this management plan begins at the first notification of the disaster. During this phase the situation must constantly be reevaluated as it progresses. During this phase critical decisions need to be made and these decisions can make or break the wellbeing of the community. This is why it is important to plan ahead and research what works best in different situations. Some challenges that are faced during the response phase include lack of direction, pet owners refusing to evacuate because of their pets, pet owners leaving their pet behind, and stray animals.

**Recovery** begins when the need for response starts to die down. The recovery phase involves, “Debris removal, demobilization of personnel, disposition of resources acquired during a disaster, rehabilitation of the community, preparation of After Action Reports and Corrective Action Plans” (8). It tends to be the phase that last the longest and requires the most funds. The direction that this phase takes depends to the planning that took place prior to the disaster. Since it involves rebuilding it allows for the opportunity to work toward a better future.

#### **Post Disaster Programs as Part of “Recovery”**

After the Hurricane Sandy disaster, many NJ residents lost everything and were facing the dark fate that they may need to surrender their furry friends. A small group from Monmouth County NJ, St. Hubert’s, and animal welfare center, stepped in and created a foster program where community members took care of animals of NJ residents that lost their homes. About 1,000 foster volunteers opened their doors to these terrified displaced pets and made them a temporary part of their family (9).

Many evacuation shelters learned their lesson after Hurricane Katrina. When hurricane Sandy hit, many shelters were prepared to accept pets. These temporary emergency shelters that accepted pets saved many lives and kept animal owners from attempting to ride out the storm. However once these temporary emergency shelters closed, many families had nowhere to go themselves, let alone bring their pets. For this reason St. Hubert’s with the help of the Humane Society founded FosterSandyPet.org. Those willing to foster could log onto this website and set up a profile stating their fostering capabilities. Within one week after launching the website, over 500 foster profiles were created. St. Hubert’s is now working on sharing this program nationwide (9).

On top of preparing for disaster and planning we must also plan for what to do after disaster hits. What can we do this those pets that were left behind and how can we rescue them? Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Utah demonstrated this during Hurricane Katrina. Along with the ASPCA they were one of the first responders on the scene. All of their volunteers go through intense training involving classroom setting training and hands on simulation. They teach their responders how to act in many different situations and ensure that they can be the heroes rather

than another victim. Smaller organizations like this can work along ASPCA and other organizations that take the lead to make a difference. They can deploy trained volunteers outside the lead organization and work side by side and combine rescue resources in order to have the greatest impact. These smaller organizations may not have the funding to have their own rescue boats and traps, but they have the skill sets to step in and help ultimately creating a difference of the lives of those animals in danger (10).

### **Community Action Plan: Engaging the Rutgers University Community in Educating the Public on Animal Emergency Response and in Training Responders to Help the Community in the Event of an Emergency – RUCART**

#### **RU CART**

We have established RU CART, the Rutgers University Community Animal Response Team that will function as a separate entity from, but will work in conjunction with the Middlesex CART. Our mission is to educate the community on how to best prepare animals for emergencies, train volunteers capable of assisting in animal care disaster procedure in the surrounding community that would assist Middlesex CART, and will work with local shelters, and community animal fosterers to temporarily shelter animals left behind.

#### **RUCART'S Proactive Approach -Education**

RUCART will work towards a proactive approach in tackling disaster relief. RUCART will work with community members to develop plans that fit each family's needs. We will hold seminars/provide a plan or action for individuals to put in place at home to prepare for disaster.

Some things that we will ask the community

- If you must evacuate do you have somewhere you can go and take your animals?
- If you must go to a shelter that does not accept animals, where will you leave them?
- If you have livestock (large animals), how will you transport them?

Have a plan on where you can take your pet

- Ask a friend or relative who lives in a different area if they would be able to house your pet in case of emergency
- Get in contact with hotels and motels in the surrounding area to see if they are pet friendly (some hotels will accept pets in times of emergency even if not normally pet friendly)
- Make arrangements with a neighbor in case disaster strikes and you cannot get home
- Research potential boarding kennels
- Have identification for each pet

Other important steps/considerations

- Listen to public service announcements regarding where you can take you pet during time of disaster
- Learn your pet's favorite hiding spots so you can locate them quickly if disaster strikes
- Practice your evacuation plan with your pet

- Obedience train your pet! Well trained animals respond better in stressful situations and are more likely to be welcome in shelters and hotels
- Familiarize your pet with car rides to avoid added stress

Have you prepared your animal disaster travel kit?

Include items such as...

- Copies of Pet License, microchip information, any other IDs, photos and vaccine records
- Pet carrier
- Leashes and collar
- Bowls
- Food (and can opener if needed)
- Medication
- Bottled water
- Any special equipment such as a heat lamp if needed
- Paper towels
- Wipes
- Blanket
- Flashlight

(11)

### **Becoming a Member of RUCART**

We will request those that inquire about RU CART to:

- 1) have sufficient interest and have the desire to help animals, their owners, and the community
- 2) complete the required on-line training
- 3) be 18 or older
- 4) be available to serve locally but they do not need to be a Rutgers affiliate to join RUCART

#### **Online Training**

To become a member of the RUCART you will need to complete the required FEMA online training courses (<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/crslist.asp>) below

- There are two courses required for all first responders
  - IS-100.B: Introduction to Incident Command System, ICS-100 and
  - IS-700.A: National Incident Management System (NIMS) An Introduction.
- The three animal-related required courses are
  - IS-10. Animals in Disasters: Module A: Awareness and Preparedness
  - IS-11. Animals in Disasters: Module B Community Planning
  - IS-111. Livestock in Disasters.

These courses will take around 2.5-3.5 hours each to complete.

The hours that were spent training could be used on the community exchange (see below)

Once these are complete, potential RUCART members will be requested to provide proof of course completion to confirm the completion of the training. Proof can be provided in the form of a certificate given upon completion that can be saved to their desktop computer. RUCART

will be holding monthly meetings to ensure everyone is up to date on procedures as well as holding advanced training classes. Other certifications members may want to look into getting include pet CPR and pet First Aid. Although not required, these are highly recommended courses.

### **Middlesex County NJ Strong**

On the Middlesex County Strong website there is a group called “Rutgers Community Animal Response Team” with the description: “Join to help your community safeguard their animals in the event of an emergency. Training (most is online) is required. In an emergency, whether it be a personal emergency or a natural or man-made disaster, you will be notified to see whether you are available to help out.” Anyone can access this page by following the link, <https://www.hourworld.org/bank/?hw=1282>. Interested parties would then sign up to join and become a member of the Rutgers University Community Animal Response Team.

### **If a Disaster Were to Take Place...**

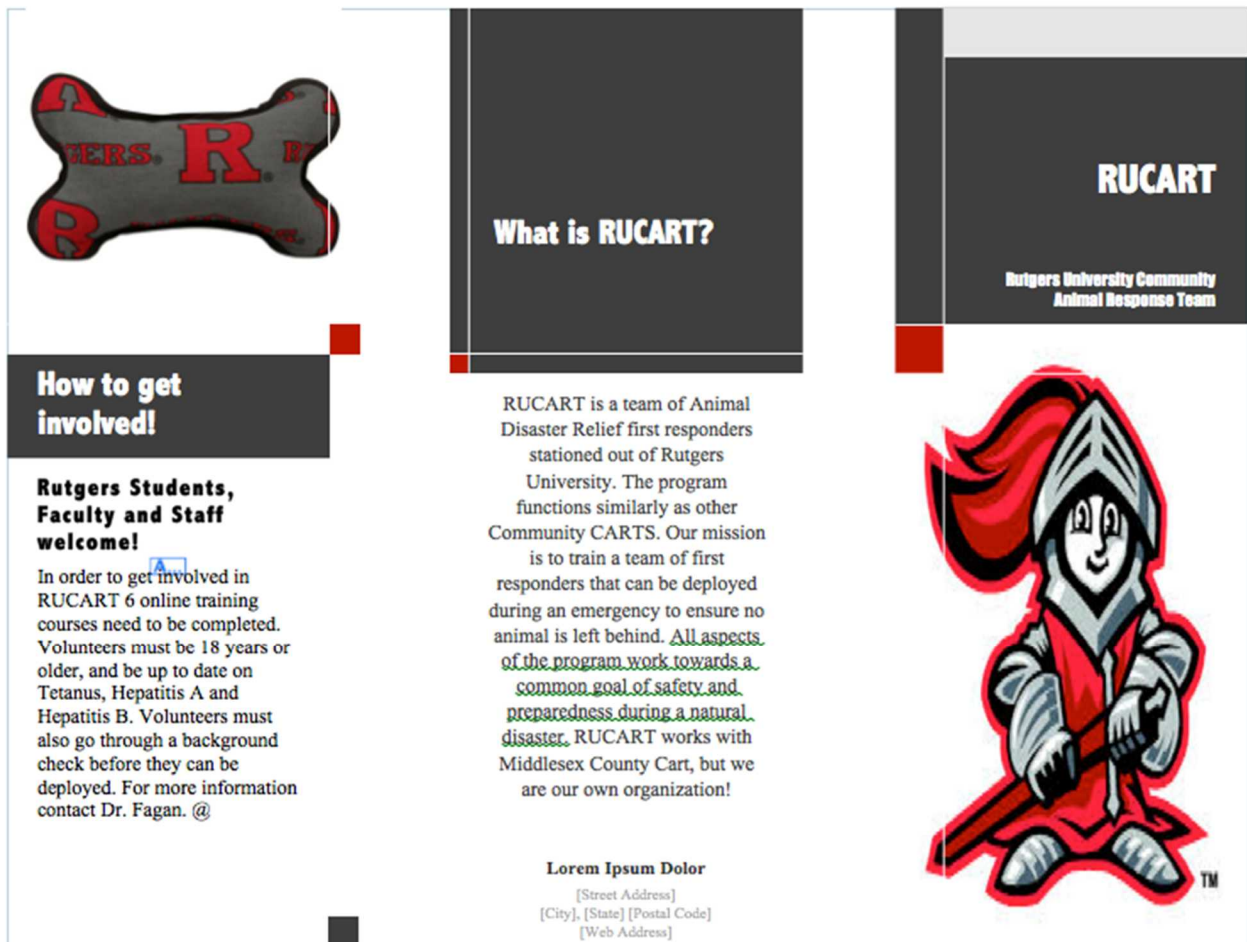
If a disaster evacuation situation were to occur, RUCART would immediately connect with Middlesex CART and work with them under their direction. Members would be contacted and directed on what to do through an announcement they would receive from Middlesex County NJ Strong. Typically, an evacuation shelter location that is deemed most appropriate in the current situation will be selected. Middlesex CART has mobile shelters that can house many animals in crates that will be brought to identified locations. Once this location is established, citizens from evacuated areas may drop their pets off. Corresponding forms will need to be filled out to ensure safe return of pets to their owners. Food can be obtained from Animal Control and cages will be requested from Middlesex County CART. Proper restraint equipment can be requested from either or both. Shelters will have open hours for owners to visit their pets.

It is an animal owners’ responsibility to get their pets to safety, whether it be a private shelter, CART shelter or taking them along. “Domestic and nondomestic animals that are lost, strayed, incapable of being cared for by their owners, or a danger to themselves or the public will be the responsibility of County Animal Response Team” (12). These unclaimed animals will be cared for and returned to their owners if possible. If they cannot be reunited they will be held for a period of time and then adopted out. Those who cannot be adopted will be surrendered to a larger shelter in the area.

### **Getting the Word Out About RUCART**

- Set up table at involvement fair to encourage the involvement of incoming Rutgers Students
- Ask other animal science groups to share the created Facebook page (coming Fall 2015)
- Share the Facebook page on Rutgers class Facebook pages to get information out to non Animal Science Students
- Hand out Brochures in campus centers
- Article in the Targum to further spread information
- Advertise the monthly meetings on student and staff list serves

## Tri-Fold Brochure to Hand out to the Rutgers Community





## Community Awareness

As part of our mission we will be engaging in community awareness and spreading the importance of having a disaster relief plan. No animal gets left behind!



## Training Programs

In order to be a part of this organization training classes need to be taken in order to assure the health and safety of all volunteers and animals.

There are 5 classes that need to be completed and they can be found at

<https://training.fema.gov/is/crslist.aspx>

In order to take any classes one must register for a SID. This is a FEMA Student Identification Number. You can register for a SID from the website above.

Your SID will serve as a unique identifier for yourself in the FEMA system. With it you can register and complete courses. Please make sure to print out a certification of completion!

### The 5 Courses that must be completed are...

- IS-100.B: Introduction to Incident Command System, ICS-100 and
- IS-700.A: National Incident Management System (NIMS) An Introduction.
- IS-10. Animals in Disasters: Module A: Awareness and Preparedness
- IS-11. Animals in Disasters: Module B Community Planning
- IS-111. Livestock in Disasters.

## Why an Animal Disaster Relief Plan is Necessary

If we do not plan for animal care during a disaster many public health issues can arise. Animals that are lost, abandoned or left behind can cause many dangers to the human populations as well as dangers to themselves. Some disaster situations result in animals running loose. This can cause aggression from fearful animals and cause community members to be bitten. Roaming animals can also cause car accidents and spread of disease. Lastly unaltered pets in the community roaming free after a disaster can cause unwanted reproduction (PASART).

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## **Letter to editor**

To the editor of the Targum,

Please consider publishing my letter to the editor below. Carrie Ruge

The Rutgers community has taking initiative in putting together an Animal Response Team called Rutgers University Community Animal Response Team (RUCART). This team of individuals is trained in disaster relief specialties and works toward a goal of no animal left behind when disaster strikes. It is composed of Rutgers community members and we would love to share the importance of animal disaster relief as well as open up our team for any Rutgers affiliate to join!

RUCART is a team of first responders that will be stationed at Rutgers who are trained in disaster relief of animals. RUCART is partnered with the CART division of Middlesex County, which ensures the safety during disasters of companion animals. To become a member of RUCART there are five classes that all RUCART participants need to be certified in to be qualified for this necessary relief program. All classes can be taken online at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/crslist.asp>. Members must be 18 years or older and dedicated to the mission of protecting our animals. Members must also have been vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B as well as Tetanus for the safety of our members and the animals in need. As a member of RUCART you will be helping your community and ensuring the safety not only of the animals but also of your fellow community members. We will be working toward a proactive approach in disaster relief planning ahead of time to ensure the safety of all involved. Look for more information at the upcoming involvement fair! We will be setting up an RUCART Facebook page soon, so keep an eye out! This accomplishment will not be one to look past but one to be celebrated because saving lives is no small deed. Join RUCART today and help us make it possible for no animal to be left behind in the event of an emergency!