

Gulf Coast Pet Owners Brace for Hurricane

Rescue groups in Louisiana ready to help animals in Gustav's path.

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Animal welfare organizations on Friday were closely monitoring Hurricane Gustav as it neared Louisiana's Gulf Coast. Cat and dog owners are being urged to prepare for when the storm hits.

Entire animal rescue teams have been put on standby to deploy at a moment's notice, according to the Humane Society of the United States. Also ready to assist animals in the hurricane's path are teams from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Animal Rescue League of Boston. Both were in route to Louisiana on Friday in advance of Gustav's expected landfall early next week.

The groups plan to manage a temporary animal shelter to help pet owners in the event of evacuations. On the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, cat and dog owners are being reminded to prepare a pet disaster plan. The American Red Cross offered the following tips: Know which hotels or motels outside your immediate area accept pets. Ask relatives or friends outside the affected area if they are willing to keep your pets. Keep a list of boarding facilities and veterinarians who can shelter animals in an emergency.

The Red Cross recommends that pet owners take their animals with them in case of evacuations. If it is not safe for people, it is not safe for pets.

Red Cross emergency shelters cannot accept pets unless they are service animals. Therefore, the organization advised pet owners to prepare a list of family, friends, pet-friendly motels, and boarding facilities that could shelter companion animals.

Dick Green, disaster relief manager for IFAW, said, "In situations like this, we can only prepare for the worst and hope for the best. We are happy to respond to the request for help from the state veterinarian of Louisiana, and plan to aid the state and its animal victims as swiftly and efficiently as possible."