

Relief Arrives for Pets Displaced by Gustav

Fleet of emergency relief vehicles carries pet food, supplies to displaced animals.

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Cats and dogs who were taken to temporary shelters after Hurricane Gustav hit the Gulf Coast are getting plenty of food and supplies from a fleet of Emergency Relief Waggins, sent by PetSmart Charities.

The relief efforts are being worked out with local and state officials in Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas to ensure that needed supplies for companion animals and their caregivers are quickly delivered to the hardest-hit areas.

The first ER Waggin' was sent to Jackson, Miss., on Monday and then traveled to Gray, La., on Wednesday to storm-battered Terrebonne Parish. A second ER Waggin' was dispatched to the SPCA of Texas in Dallas. A third ER Waggin' arrived in Ennis, Texas, on Tuesday, and is available to provide rapid response along the Gulf Coast, or will be on standby pending the impact of Hurricane Hanna this week. Additional ER Waggins are being prepared for deployment to affected areas as needed in the days to come.

Each of the 53-foot trailers carries 16 tons of emergency animal care and volunteer goods valued at \$50,000. The supplies include pet food, crates, beds, bowls, litter, and litter pans, and other necessary animal care items, as well as a generator, fans, tents, a battery charger, lights, and other supplies to assist the volunteers on site who are caring for displaced companion animals.

The death of countless pets after Hurricane Katrina three years ago served as a wake-up call about the importance of ensuring emergency rescue and care for animals affected by the disaster, said Della Maddalena, PetSmart Charities executive director.

"We began preparing for Gustav several days before it made landfall, and we will provide necessary assistance as it is requested for as long as it's needed," Maddalena said in a statement.

Many more pets who were left behind, or who were stray when the storm hit, are expected to be rescued in the coming week and will require sheltering at temporary locations.