

Rescuers Assist Dog Victims of California Fires

Cats and dogs are being temporarily housed at various shelters in Southern California.

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The recent wildfires that charred homes in Southern California have forced thousands to flee, and animal welfare organizations are assisting with moving cats and dogs out of danger.

At the request of state authorities, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles dispatched its Disaster Animal Response Team to the Sayre fire near Sylmar and the Freeway Complex Fire that originated in Orange County. The DART unit provides temporary housing, food, and medical care to animals.

In addition, a mobile kennel has been set up at Sylmar High School, and small pets can be taken to the Mission animal shelter. As of early this week, Los Angeles Animal Services reported evacuation information from the following shelters: Mission Shelter: 85 dogs, 43 cats, five birds, two snakes, nine rats, three rabbits, and a chinchilla. West Valley (Chatsworth) Animal Shelter: 10 cats, five dogs. Pierce College: 17 horses, capacity is about 200. Sylmar High School: 16 dogs, 15 cats, capacity is about 40.

The spcaLA urges pet owners to prepare for an emergency by following guidelines to ensure the safety of their animals in the event of an urgent situation or natural disaster. Some general recommendations include: Keep a supply of canned or dry pet food and bottled water with other emergency provisions including pet prescriptions. For dogs, include a muzzle since some state or federal rescue operations require them if you use their services to evacuate. Watch a video on what to include in your pet's disaster kit.

If roads are blocked, professional help may not be possible immediately so familiarize yourself and other family members with pet CPR, resuscitation, and general first-aid procedures. Quick action could save a pet's life.

Try not to display stress and anxiety when dealing with pets. Most animals are aware of their owner's emotions and can read signs of stress. This can cause otherwise calm pets to display aggressive behavior.

Continuously check pet structures and favorite hiding places for hazardous debris.

Dogs and cats should wear I.D. tags with an updated address and phone number at all times, in addition to being microchipped.

Keep pets up-to-date on vaccinations. Pets may become disoriented and stray or housed in shelters with other animals, thereby potentially becoming exposed to infectious diseases.

Alert local shelters immediately upon discovering that a pet is lost.

Ask your local fire department, animal shelter, or veterinarian for a "Pet Alert" sign for doors and windows, or make your own by listing your pets on 3-by-5-inch cards and display them prominently.

From now through Nov. 30, VCA Animal Hospitals throughout Southern California are offering free boarding for companion animals whose families were evacuated or displaced as a result of the firestorms. Boarding assistance for pets is based on space availability at individual locations.

"As families are being evacuated to shelters or facing the loss of their homes, VCA hopes to ease their burden by offering free boarding for pets so they can focus on the critical issues with their families and homes," said Art Antin, chief operating officer of VCA Animal Hospitals.