

Organizations Mobilize to Help Animals in Haiti

Groups assemble to provide vaccinations, vet care to animals affected by the earthquake.

Posted: January 19, 2010, 2 a.m. EST

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) continues to monitor the situation in Haiti and prepare the distribution of veterinary medical supplies as needed, says Heather Case, the association's coordinator for emergency preparedness and response.

The main focus is to help human survivors of the 7.0 earthquake that struck Jan. 12, then after about a week, Case says, the attention turns to companion animals, livestock and wildlife. "There are some livestock issues that are of concern, as well as some companion animal issues," she says.

It's anticipated that the immediate needs will include vaccinations and supplies for traumas. According to Chris Cutter, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) spokesperson, the organization has a team on the ground in neighboring Dominican Republic and is stocking a mobile clinic to take into Haiti.

"It's impossible to tell at the moment, but we're preparing to do some mass vaccinating and feeding of backyard livestock along with acute vet care, vaccination and feeding of companion animals," Cutter says. He adds that there's a big population of stray dogs in the island nation, and there's already concern about rabies.

In parallel to that work, IFAW is trying to get an official invite into Haiti. Security in general and security at the border seems to be an issue, Cutter says.

IFAW and the World Society for the Protection of Animals have agreed to lead a coalition of rescue groups to address the needs of animals in Haiti. There are an estimated 5 million head of livestock in the country made up mostly of goats, an untold number of companion animals, and native wildlife all adversely affected by the earthquake, according to IFAW.

Ian Robinson, emergency relief director at IFAW, says animal nonprofits need to coordinate as much as possible. "We're already concerned about a possible outbreak of rabies, leptospirosis or another zoonotic disease. We need to set up vaccination and feeding programs as soon as possible. Finally, we need to get acute, critical care to the animals that need it most."

The American Humane Association also plans to join the coalition to aid animals and commit resources. The coalition expects to have professional animal rescue responders arrive in Haiti in the coming days to assess animal needs and provide initial assistance.

Additional efforts include a financial boost from Henry Schein, Inc., provider of healthcare products and services to office-based dental, medical and animal health practitioners, and its supplier partners, who earmarked \$1 million in medical supplies to partner non-governmental organizations that are providing disaster relief. Products already on their way to Haiti include essential veterinary supplies, such as vaccinations and eye wash solution.

A pledge also was made by American Dog Rescue (ADR) in the form of a \$50,000 challenge grant for the purpose of reaching \$100,000 in total aid for Haitian animals. ADR support the Humane Society of the United States by matching donor contributions dollar-for-dollar for up to half the \$100,000 initial goal.