

Fires Show Need for Dog-Friendly Evacuations

A study by the American Humane Association reveals many dog owners won't leave animals behind.

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With wildfires burning in Southern California and hundreds of thousands forced to flee, many pet owners are reluctant to leave their homes if pets are unable to go along, according to a recent survey from the American Humane Association (AHA).

In a national telephone survey of more than 1,000 adults, 47 percent of respondents said they would refuse rescue assistance if it meant they had to leave their pets behind. The survey broke down the respondents by region; results revealed that the southern and western regions of the country showed strongest support for formal disaster plans for pets at 74 percent and 76 percent, respectively.

Those regions are closely associated with hurricanes and wildfires.

"There's nothing more powerful than seeing a man or woman refuse rescue efforts because there is not a rescue lined up for their family pet," said Marie Belew Wheatley, president and CEO of AHA. "This survey brings to light that rescue coordinators need to have plans in place for animal rescue. If they don't, more people could be left in harm's way."

However, the study revealed that if children are involved, priorities change.

Sixty percent of those surveyed who have children would evacuate if they had to leave their pets behind, compared with 37 percent of childless respondents.

"These findings demonstrate the incredible power of the human-animal connection and make it clear that people believe animals should be considered in rescue efforts," Wheatley said.

Preparedness is key, and the AHA offers dog owners a few tips in case of an emergency.

Have a plan. Families should designate who is in charge of getting pets out and plan where to meet; cell phone coverage may be poor.

Keep a list of pet-friendly locations. Know which animal shelters and boarding facilities are equipped to handle an influx of pets in an emergency. Also, keep a list of pet-friendly hotels.

Update pet identification. After a disaster, many people are displaced and pet owners can be hard to track down. Ensure identification tags include cell phone numbers as well as an alternate contact, such as a friend or family member.

Prepare a pet emergency kit. Items should include leashes, collars, extra ID tags, water, food, medications, health records, first-aid kit, vet contact information with authorization to treat pets and photos to prove ownership. Keep the kit in or near the pet's carrier for quick accessibility.

Gather relief plans developed by emergency management personnel. Compile information and phone numbers from police, fire, health, wildlife and agriculture departments for reference in an emergency.

For more updates on how the California wildfires are affecting dogs and their owners, [click here](#).