

Katrina Survivors Asked for Pet Tales

Researchers seek accounts of pet loss, evacuation and reunion for psychological study.

Hurricane Katrina survivors who lost pets in the disaster and those who were reunited with their beloved companions or took them away safely are being asked to participate in a research study that could show just how important pets are during times of crisis.

Researchers hope that the findings will be used to help pass new legislation to provide relief aid for animals during disasters, and to prevent situations similar to Hurricane Katrina, where evacuees were often forced leave to their pets behind.

People did not evacuate because they were unwilling to abandon their pets, says psychologist Melissa Hunt, who is conducting the study through the University of Pennsylvania. I think we've all assumed that there was a psychological impact, but its never been documented.

The study is available on the Internet, and includes a series of questions designed to assess participants level of attachment to their pets, and how they've felt following the hurricane. After collecting the questionnaires, researchers plan to follow up with each person in two months to see if anything has changed.

Hunt acknowledges that some people might not be able to contribute because they do not have Internet access, but notes that there are many survivors who have something to say about their ordeal.

That's what really brings it all to life, she says.

The study is available at the University of Pennsylvania website.

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