

AVMA Disaster Update # 27
(To be posted at www.avma.org/disaster)
(This information is subject to change as additional information becomes available)

Event: Hurricane Katrina
Date: September 26, 2005
Situation: AVMA Hurricane Katrina Disaster Situation Report

AVMA Veterinary Medical Assistance Team (VMAT) Update:

Memorandum

From: VMAT-2, VA Mental Health
Su: After Action Report: VA Mental Health assisting VMAT-2
Date: September 15, 2005

On September 10, 2005 VMAT-2 established a field hospital at the Humane Society of Southern Mississippi, Gulfport, Mississippi. VMAT-2's goal is to provide assistance to the local veterinary community in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Due to the catastrophic nature of the disaster, most clients lost loved ones, homes and vehicles. In addition, many businesses have massive structural damage to their offices therefore employees are unable to work. This creates a huge financial hardship.

VMAT-2 has been deployed in several disasters. Hurricane Katrina's far reaching magnitude was unprecedented. Frequently after major disasters clients believe there is a medical issue with their pet when in fact they are healthy. Through these experiences, we have learned that the clients are looking for emotional support. Their need for assurance causes an emotional strain on the VMAT staff. Having trained mental health support has allowed VMAT to focus on the needs of the animals while the mental health support has worked with the clients. The mental health support staff has effectively de-escalated emotionally unstable clients. In addition, the Mental Health team as assisted the clients in accessing community resources.

Another benefit has been the briefing and debriefing process provided to VMAT-2 from VA Mental Health. The team has benefited greatly from the knowledge that emotional support is available to them on an individual basis.

To our knowledge this is the first time VMAT and VA Mental Health have worked together during a disaster. The experience has been positive. VMAT members appear less stressed and are coping more effectively with the disaster environment.

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