

A new understanding for handling disaster

AVMA, federal government reach agreement on roles in emergency response

Following Hurricane Katrina, the AVMA Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams managed to treat thousands of animals, despite the lapse of a formal agreement between the AVMA and the federal government regarding disaster response.

In mid-February, the AVMA signed a new memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health and Human Services to help clarify the roles of each entity in providing veterinary services during disasters and other emergencies. The memorandum sets the stage for ongoing coordination between the AVMA and the HHS.

"The AVMA is pleased to have reached this agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services highlighting both parties' strong interests in continued communication and collaboration in the delivery of veterinary services during emergencies," said Dr. Heather Case, AVMA coordinator for emergency preparedness and response, who oversees the Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams.

The memorandum also distinguishes the VMATs from the federal government's newer National Veterinary Response Team, which has evolved from the longstanding AVMA program.

A 15-year history

The AVMA created the VMAT program after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, when disaster plans did not account for the displacement of hundreds or perhaps thousands of animals.

In 1993, the AVMA signed a memorandum with the HHS that established the VMAT program as a public-private partnership to aid the federal government by providing veterinary emergency preparedness and response services.

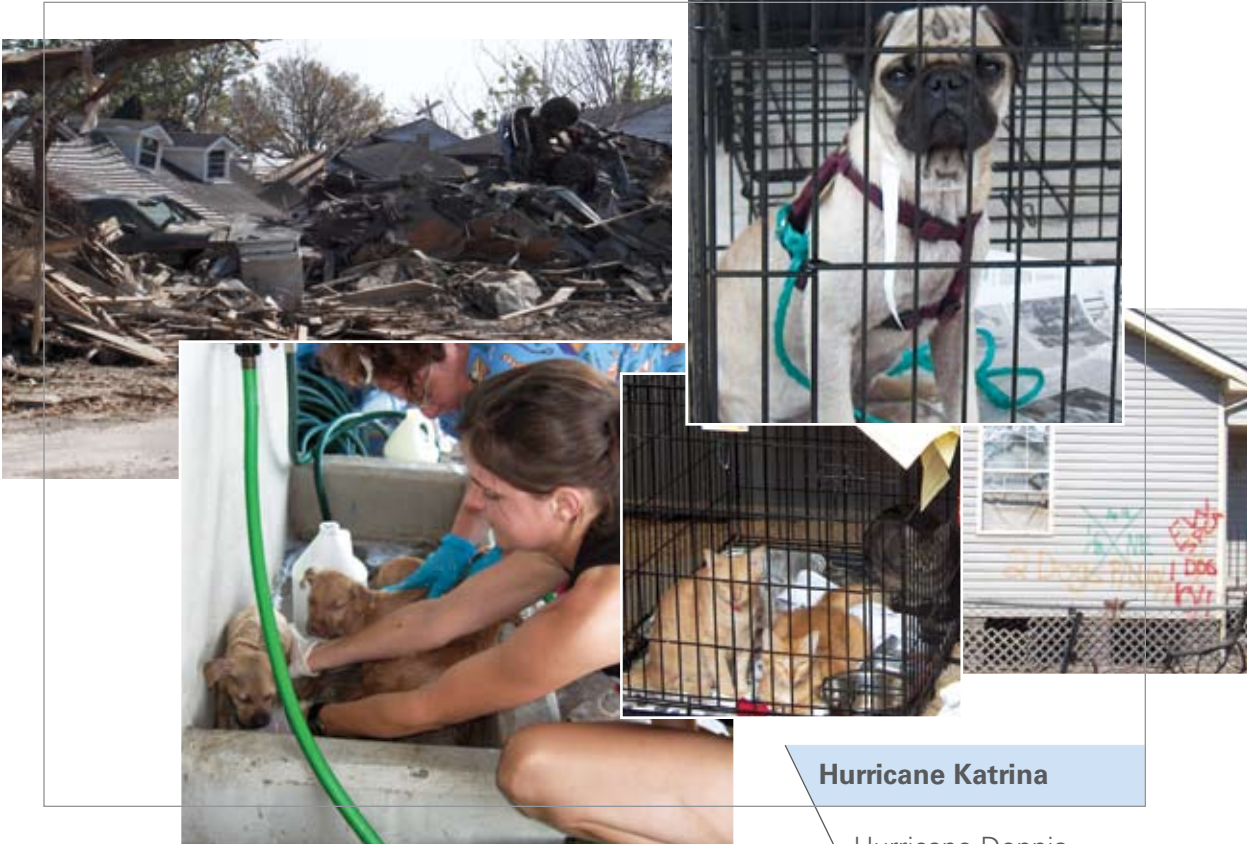
In that original model, the AVMA maintained the teams and trained the members, with funding from the American Veterinary Medical Foundation. The VMAT members became temporary federal employees under the National Disaster Medical System during each deployment. Team members responded to numerous natural disasters, were on hand at major events, and provided veterinary care to search-and-rescue dogs at the World Trade Center after the terrorist attacks of 2001.

Following Sept. 11, the structure of federal emergency management began changing in ways that constrained private oversight of components such as the VMATs. In the post-Katrina period, federal officials have developed the National Veterinary Response Team as a program that operates entirely under government oversight to provide veterinary emergency preparedness and response services. The situation necessitated rewriting the memorandum between the AVMA and the HHS and differentiating the VMATs from the National Veterinary Response Team.

"We are very pleased that this has come to an agreeable solution," said Dr. Terry Ryan Kane, who serves as the VMAT representative on the AVMA Committee on Disaster

Highlights of past deployments of the AVMA Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams





Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Dennis

Hurricane Rita

Hurricane Wilma

State of the Union address

Hurricane Isabel

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

State of the Union address

Olympics in Salt Lake City

Rally in Washington, D.C.

Assistance in surveillance testing during a Virginia outbreak of low-pathogenic avian influenza

Arizona wildfires

Independence Day in Washington, D.C.

Hurricane Lili

State of the Union address

G8 Summit

President Reagan's funeral

Democratic National Convention

Hurricane Charley

Republican National Convention

Hurricane Frances

Hurricane Ivan

Tropical Storm Ernesto

and Emergency Issues. "Now that the lines are no longer fuzzy, we can work together as separate entities."

Looking ahead, the AVMA is exploring new directions for its VMAT program, such as aiding state governments with emergency preparedness and response services. The VMAT mission remains the same—to assist with animal care, animal issues, and public health during and after disasters.

A working agreement

The AVMA will continue collaborating with the federal government. According to the new memorandum, the AVMA and the HHS each will appoint a liaison to communicate on matters relevant to veterinary emergency preparedness and response. The AVMA has appointed Dr. Case as its liaison. At press time, the HHS had not yet appointed its liaison.

The AVMA will assist the HHS in identifying expertise to address existing and emerging veterinary issues. The AVMA also agrees to help promote opportunities for veterinary professionals to participate in the National Disaster Medical System.

On the government side, the HHS agrees to designate a liaison from the assistant secretary for preparedness and response to represent the department's views at meetings of the AVMA Committee on Disaster and Emergency Issues.

Additionally, the HHS will provide guidance on the procedures and requirements for individuals to serve as intermittent federal personnel within the National Disaster Medical System. The department will administer programs for registering, credentialing, organizing, training, equipping, and deploying the intermittent federal personnel.

The AVMA-HHS memorandum is subject to review every three years. 📧

—KATIE BURNS

Rural practice input sought from all veterinarians, students

Whether you are a veterinarian who is currently in rural practice, who left it, or who never entered it at all, your input is being sought by the Academy of Rural Veterinarians.

The ARV is requesting all veterinarians, regardless of their present employment or area of expertise—as well as veterinary students—to complete a brief online survey designed to more fully explain why veterinarians enter rural practice, and why some leave and others stay. This feedback will help guide efforts to recruit and retain more veterinarians for this underserved practice area.

Participation in the survey is anonymous, and responses will be kept confidential, the ARV assures. This survey is a cooperative effort between the ARV and the colleges of veterinary medicine at Oregon State University and The Ohio State University.

For questions or comments about the survey, contact the ARV toll-free at (877) 362-1150 or at ARVvet@aol.com. 📧

The survey Web site is

<http://fasurvey.>

retention.sgizmo.com.

The survey
is also posted
on the AVMA
Web site at

www.avma.org/fsvm.

Communications manager joins AVMA Governmental Relations Division

Eric M. McKeeby started work Feb. 11 as communications manager for the AVMA Governmental Relations Division. The purpose of the new position is to enhance the reach and visibility of the GRD office in Washington, D.C.

"We are very excited to have Eric join the AVMA team as communications manager, governmental relations," said Dr. Mark Lutschauin, GRD director. "His extensive communications experience will bolster our advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill."

McKeeby's responsibilities include the development and production of GRD communications materials—such as talking points, press releases, brochures, issue papers, backgrounders, op-eds, letters to the editor, and congressional testimony. He also will be responsible for maintaining a relationship with the local and national media, planning and executing press conferences, and overseeing content on the GRD Web site.

"The GRD is a key player on a number of crucial issues—including public health, food supply safety and security, and bioterrorism," McKeeby said. "I look forward to helping ensure that the AVMA's important messages reach their intended audiences and result in positive outcomes."

McKeeby comes to the AVMA after serving as communications and public relations manager for the Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society, an organization for professionals whose work relates to the regulation of health products. Previously, McKeeby was a public affairs director and photojournalist with the U.S. Army, serving in Africa as well as the United States. He earned a master's degree in interactive telecommunications from New York University in 2002. 📧