

community. Better ideas are sought for how to deal with reproduction issues for animals in toxic areas following a disaster or emergency, including the political will to spay and neuter loose animals.

Last, but not least, I would like to recognize the post-Katrina efforts of the following members of the Animal Law Committee who have made a difference with regard to animal-related improvements to disaster relief. They are: Sarah Babcock, Amy Breyer (who is now heading up the Select Legal Panel), Jim Carr, David Favre, Kristina Hancock, Tony Macauley, Joyce Tischler (who worked cooperatively with this Committee on FAQs), Ledy VanKavage, and the Honorable Benjamin Zvenia.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Kevin Dennison in organizing summits and teleconferences with stakeholders and congratulate him on his new position as Emergency Program Manager, USDA APHIS Animal Care, Western Region. Also, a

special thank you to Gregory Christy, DVM, AVMA, Ollie Davidson, HSUS, Chester Gipson and Allan Hogue, USDA, Tom McGinn, DVM, Director, Food, Agriculture and Veterinary Defense Office of Health Affairs, USDHS, Charlene Moe, RICP, and Stephanie Ostrowski, CDC Epidemiologist.

If you would like to learn more about basic Emergency Management concepts, consider taking FEMA courses online at: <http://training.fema.gov/EMICourses/>. You might also want to check the HSUS website at: http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center/disasters_press_room/; or the AVMA website at: http://www.avma.org/disaster/vet_practices.asp.

Also, if you would like to be a member of this Subcommittee, or have valuable expertise, please let me, Barbara Gislason, subcommittee chair, know. You can reach me at gislasonbj@aol.com. ☺☺

PETS CAUGHT IN THE FORECLOSURE CRISIS: WE ALL CAN HELP

By: Allie Phillips

Every day, we read and see news reports on the economic down-turn in America. Americans are paying more for gas, food, and energy. Many are losing their jobs and losing their homes due to foreclosure. Now, there are further victims: companion animals. These animals are showing up in droves at the nation's shelters, as their families find they can no longer afford to care for them or must seek new living arrangements that do allow pets.

Each day, 5,400 homes are entering foreclosure procedures, and sources at No Paws Left Behind, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing funding and finding safe placements for pets in the foreclosure crisis, estimate that up to 4 million homes may be foreclosed in the next few years. As a result, more than 1 million companion animals will be impacted.

THE TRAGIC SCENARIOS

Several tragic scenarios for these companion animals are occurring:

- Some foreclosed homeowners are simply leaving their pets behind. Pets are being locked inside their homes, often without food or water. Some are being set loose in hopes that a stranger will take them in. These options are not only traumatic for pets but also illegal. No Paws Left Behind receives numerous reports of foreclosure inspectors who find deceased animals in and outside homes. In one widely



publicized case in Michigan, two dogs and five cats were abandoned outside during the cold winter. Two of the dogs were tethered and did not have access to food or water. Concerned neighbors began feeding the pets and pled with the county animal control to rescue them. After five weeks passed and animal control still refused to help, media frenzy ensued, and a local shelter came to the rescue of all the pets.

- Some pet owners are taking their pets to municipal or private shelters that they hope will find homes for their pets. The outcome for this scenario can be dire, as many of these once-happy family pets will be euthanized simply because there is not enough room. Many municipal and private nonprofit shelters are already at capacity and do not have the resources or space for the additional animals. They also may be experiencing a decline in donations due to the economy.
- Some pet owners refuse to be separated from their pets and look for other options to keep their pets safe, including living in their cars. There is reportedly one lady in California who is living in her

Honda with her two Golden Retrievers. At night, she parks in a safe lot reserved for homeless citizens who sleep in their cars. This is her only option to continue living with her beloved dogs. Many pet owners who are going to such extremes to stay with their pets are also dealing with the cost of basic pet care. No Paws Left Behind has learned that pet food requests are increasing at food pantries across the county. As people struggle, so do their pets.

NATIONAL HELP

Addressing these scenarios on a national level are American Humane and No Paws Left Behind. American Humane, as one of the country's oldest organizations dedicated to protecting children and animals, has created tip sheets for:

- Pet owners, on how to provide for their pets after losing their homes to foreclosure;
- Mortgage lenders and investigators, on how to handle pets abandoned at foreclosed homes; and
- Shelter professionals, on how to handle the influx of pets from foreclosure situations.

These tips can be downloaded at <http://www.americanhumane.org> and provided to animal shelters, pet stores, veterinary clinics, mortgage offices, and the local media to raise awareness of this crisis.

American Humane also has created a grant program for public and private shelters to help offset the cost of boarding animals at other locations and provide veterinary services, foster care services, and behavior training for animals that are frightened or stressed from being displaced. American Humane staff is also available to answer questions.

No Paws Left Behind established a grant program to help people remain with their pets. Grants help recipients pay for pet deposits at apartments, boarding costs, and veterinary care. No Paws Left Behind also seeks and saves foreclosure pets at shelters when possible. Zion, a 12-year-old black Labrador Retriever, was unable to stay in his home after a foreclosure and ended up in a Los Angeles shelter with significant medical conditions, including a tumor on his head. No Paws Left Behind believed a dog like Zion that had always known the comforts of home and loving caregivers should have a second chance. The group adopted him from the shelter, funded his medical care, and found him lifetime placement at Hakuna Matata Rescue in Southern California.

WE ALL CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are many ways all of us can join groups like American Humane and No Paws Left Behind in


helping people and their pets during this financial crisis.

One way to help is to volunteer or become a foster provider at a local shelter. Fostering is particularly helpful for pets that do not fare well in shelter environments. Offering your home and heart to these animals provides significant relief to shelter workers, as well as to the animals.

Through my volunteer work with King Street Cat Rescue in Alexandria, Va., I foster Bebe, a seven-year-old Maine Coon, and his housemate Itty Bitty, a five-year-old Tuxedo. Their owner was admitted to a nursing home and the cats did not fair well in the no-kill shelter due to the trauma of losing their home. Since adoptions are down for many shelters and rescue groups, Bebe and Itty Bitty have been at my home since December 2007. Having them with me has made room for two more cats to enter the shelter.

If you do not have time to volunteer or space to foster, consider donating money to help shelters maintain high volumes of pets.

Attorneys with the ABA/TIPS Animal Law Committee can donate legal expertise and time to shelters. There are many situations in which pets have been abandoned inside or outside vacant homes and caring neighbors have asked animal control officers to help rescue the animals. Many times neighbors are being compelled to take action to save these pets. Every state has laws on abandonment and neglect, including provisions for seizing pets from abandoned homes. There is no reason for animals to languish when laws are sufficient to rescue them and bring them to safety. Providing legal expertise and time, particularly to shelters with investigatory powers, can help them understand the animal welfare laws and provide the best response to abandoned animals.

Animal welfare professionals and shelter workers already endure significant challenges in caring for abandoned, homeless and abused animals due to limited space and resources. The nation's financial crisis only adds to the burden as people are forced to tighten their belts and relinquish their pets. Everyone can find ways to help during the foreclosure crisis so that more animals' lives can be saved. Visit <http://www.americanhumane.org>. 

Allie Phillips, J.D. is the director of the Office of Public Policy for the *American Humane Association*; the vice president of No Paws Left Behind and a council member of the State Bar of Michigan Animal Law Section. She was a senior attorney with the National District Attorneys Association and an assistant prosecuting attorney in Lansing, MI. She is a graduate of the University Of Detroit Mercy School Of Law.