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EXPECTING THE WORST



PHOTOS BY TIM AHRENS/STILLWATER NEWS PRESS

Volunteers work to ready cages for animals brought in after a "weather disaster" Saturday in Stillwater. The Payne County Animal Response Team partnered with other agencies to simulate disaster training as storm season in Oklahoma approaches.

Agencies train to help animals in wake of disaster

By Tim Ahrens

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Members of the Payne County Animal Response Team (PCART), Texas A&M's Veterinary Emergency Team (TAMU), the Oklahoma Large Animal First Responders (OLAFR) and American Humane responded to care for animals Saturday in the wake of heavy flooding and tornadoes in the Stillwater area.

Well, that's not exactly true – it was all sunshine around Stillwater, and although there were wind gusts, none were as strong as a tornado funneling down to the ground. But the agencies trained as if it were, in case they're ever needed. Dr. Elisabeth Giedt, PCART's public information officer, said training is ramping up now as storm season in Oklahoma draws near.



Brandon Dominguez, the intelligence officer for Texas A&M's Veterinary Emergency Team, shows off a mobile hospital trailer capable of treating animals at the site of a disaster for decontamination and even minor surgeries.

"Two weeks ago, we did a mock exercise with American Humane, and this week we're doing a mock exercise with the Texas A&M emergency response team, the Oklahoma Large Animal First Responders and American Humane is coming in again. The TAMU folks have

had this emergency response team since 2008 ... they went to (respond to Hurricane) Harvey, so they have trained people on staff. The (OSU) vet school's connection to this is that a number of members of PCART also are here.

"So the goal of the exercise – bad weather

has rolled in, we've had a ton of rain, there's been flooding and then two tornadoes hit. So our goal is setting up animal sheltering facilities for both dogs, cats and large animals. We will practice the

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incident command system FEMA puts together to create this temporary shelter for these pets. Our team members will practice 'there's a horse at the corner of such and such, it's tangled in the fence, the water's rising, what can you do?'"

The agencies' members and volunteers set up shop at Oklahoma State's Fire Service Training site, south of Highway 51 off Karsten Creek Road. Some responders wore reflective vests and sat as they were briefed on the hypothetical disaster, others prepared cages for shelter and more prepared to bring in the "animals" – mostly stuffed dog plushes, although Giedt said live horses would be used to simulate handling large animals.

Kevin Trimmell of OLAFR said his organization is located centrally in the state, which can be a challenge when disastrous weather in Oklahoma can be so spread out. He hopes more training events like the one Saturday can help them work with different counties and expand their reach.

"We're kinda' umbrella'd under the whole state, so individualizing ourselves and fitting in with different CART programs will be a big plus," Trimmell said. "There's probably 10, 15 (CARTs). We deploy three, four times a year to different situations."

Texas A&M's emer-



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PCART recently got this trailer, which will help bring supplies for the agency where they are needed in the wake of disaster so they might help animals in need.

gency team brought a mobile hospital, housed inside a trailer that can handle several different situations. The team's intelligence officer, Brandon Dominguez, said that the team is based in College Station, operates outside of Texas but can be cleared to go to other states and help in times of larger disasters.

"The Banfield Foundation contacted us, wanting to do something to help response with animals," Dominguez said. "Based on the amount of funding they were willing to give, it allowed us to design something mobile, a veterinary clinic, basically. Our thinking is somewhat small, big enough to work in and we're mobile and pull up, open the doors and get to work immediately. Our team also has 6,000 square feet

of tent space so they can set up hospitals.

"We have some larger mobile veterinary units – it's set up very much like a treatment room in a veterinary hospital, and there's a pharmacy cache in there. We have a wet table so we can do brief contamination cleaning procedures, we have anesthesia so we can do minor surgeries, and do basic exams with good surgical lights. Any of that triage or supporting care that's necessary, we're allowed to do that." Own generator, carries about 30 gallons and has its own wastewater collection."

Dr. Lesa Staubus with American Humane said the plan in a disastrous situation in Stillwater comes down to people knowing how to fulfill their roles and have everything set up before the situation

even warrants their response. Animals in Stillwater could be

housed at the command center, worked on by TAMU's mobile hospital trailer or brought to OSU's vet hospital, all depending on their condition when brought in by owners or found by strangers.

"All animals entering are going to be vaccinated for routine diseases commonly spread from animal to animal," Staubus said. "It's giving these people a chance to utilize this equipment purchased here by PCART, get familiar with it, how to undertake this and know what they might overlook and pay attention to. This is really a good opportunity to get this team prepared for when this really does happen, otherwise these mistakes could be having in the midst of the disaster."

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