



# FEMA

## *Is There Room For The Animals In Your Sheltering Plan*

**Walker County, TX** – In 2005 Hurricane Rita pummeled many cities causing a mass exodus of people and animals. Some found their way to Huntsville, Texas, a designated shelter hub.

Officials were faced with a dilemma: what to do with the animals that tagged along with their owners? Fearing a disaster within a disaster, they hoped for the best, sought help, and vowed never to be caught in that position again. They developed the first animal sheltering plan in Texas called the Animal Issues Plan.

“We were equipped to shelter 1,600 people. We had 360 evacuees following Hurricane Katrina. Here comes Hurricane Rita. We received about half of the population of Galveston. Then the mayor of Houston decided that they were going to evacuate Houston,” said A.L. Davis, Chief Deputy and Emergency Management Coordinator for the Walker County Sheriff Department.

“We received a little over 15,000 [people]. Jack Colley, director of the Governor's Division of Emergency Management, advised evacuees to bring their animals. We did not know where we were going to place them. We had no cages or leashes, no food, nor means of transporting them. We had no way of associating animal and owner,” continued Davis.

According to regulations, pets are not allowed in a Red Cross approved facility. Service animals are the only exception. Huntsville had to quickly provide shelter for 360 small animals and about 50 cattle and horses.

Later, Davis met with Reggie Leplay, county agent, John Powledge, chairman of Walker County Fair Association, and Dusty Bouillion, director of Texas Animal Health, to develop a comprehensive emergency plan, one that would address animal issues.

Two subcommittees were formed--large animal and small animal. Each had chairpersons, co-chairs, and team leaders. An organizational chart was established. Forms and instructions were developed. Instructions on Intake of Live Animals, Intake and Disposal of Dead Animals, and Procedures for entering Triage Unit were written.

“Following Rita we had a real bad flea infestation problem. We had to get medical help. So we knew that we needed a medical team,” Davis said. “Another problem was identifying pets. Upon deactivation, we went to each shelter and told evacuees to get on a bus if they had an animal. We took them to the fairgrounds and instructed them to walk up and put their hands on their animal. That was the only way we had to identify the owner. Now, the registration group takes a picture of the animal and owner and collects shelter information from the owner. We now tag the animal and the owner. The transportation team accompanies the registration team to the pet owner's shelter and transports the pet to the animal shelter.”

The arena at Sam Houston University is the designated animal shelter. It's equipped with radio communication, proper lighting, heating and air, and stalls to accommodate horses. Making certain there's sufficient supplies and food remains an issue. The county relies upon donations.

“We tested our Animal Issues Plan during our hurricane exercise. We used live animals and some small, stuffed animals. We have a pretty good system. It works,” Davis said.



**Walker County,  
Texas**



### **Quick Facts**

- Year: **2005**
- Sector: **Public**
- Cost: **Amount Not Available**
- Primary Activity/Project: **Mitigation Planning/Disaster Resistant Universities**
- Primary Funding: **Local Sources**