

8-7-2018

Katrina to Maria: Pet Evacuation in the Eye of the Storm

Tara Cooley

Golden Gate University School of Law, lawreview@ggu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggu_law_review_blog



Part of the [Animal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cooley, Tara, "Katrina to Maria: Pet Evacuation in the Eye of the Storm" (2018). *GGU Law Review Blog*. 52.
https://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggu_law_review_blog/52

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at GGU Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in GGU Law Review Blog by an authorized administrator of GGU Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jfischer@ggu.edu.



Erin's family on route to their hotel in preparation for Hurricane Irma.

This was a common situation for Irma victims. Some families in Naples were unable to evacuate, but fortunately the storm surge never hit, and those who stayed made it through the storm. Hurricane Irma is not the first storm to cause concern for pet families. When New Orleans was hit hard by Hurricane Katrina (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/us/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts/index.html>), in 2005, the city was unprepared. Although 80 percent of New Orleans' population evacuated before the storm hit, nearly 100,000 people remained trapped (<http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina>), many without cars, in the storm that flooded 80 percent of the city. Over 30 percent (<http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina>) of the city was living in poverty; a segment of the population which was left particularly vulnerable. Tens of thousands of people, locked out (<http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina>) of overfilled shelters, were left stranded with no food and water. Forty-four percent (<http://www.pressherald.com/2017/08/31/lesson-from-katrina-no-pet-left-behind/>) of individuals who did not evacuate stayed because there was no plan for pets, and they would not abandon their pets. Not all citizens were rescued, and many did not survive the storm. Over 1800 people died (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/us/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts/index.html>), directly or indirectly from Hurricane Katrina. Some families left their companion animals behind with the belief that they would return in a few days. Instead, families were trapped outside of the city for weeks, which left over 100,000 (<http://www.pressherald.com/2017/08/31/lesson-from-katrina-no-pet-left-behind/>) animals to fend for themselves, 70,000 of which died. Individuals were not prosecuted for leaving their pets behind, leaving pets behind was the city's plan, or lack thereof (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4860776>). "Pets were not allowed on the bus, and when a police officer confiscated a little boy's dog, Snow Ball (http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9223167/ns/health-pet_health/t/sad-story-little-boy-his-dog-grips-us/#.WfaH-bpFycw), the child cried until he vomited." Snowball was never found.

In 2006, Congress passed the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS Act (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/109/hr3858>), a landmark act for emergency preparedness. PETS requires a community's emergency plan account for the needs of families with companion or service animals. PETS provided protection to pets and their families during Hurricane Sandy (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-pets-survived-hurricane-sandy>), Harvey (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4838716/Heroes-rescue-dog-raging-Hurricane-Harvey-flood.html>), Irma (<http://www.wftv.com/news/trending-now/hurricane-irma-pet-owners-have-rights-during-evacuation-shelter-during-storms/604748490>), and Maria (<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-09-26/couple-defy-hurricane-maria-on-roof-to-save-pets-lots-of-them>). The image of evacuation has changed a lot from Katrina (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2016/10/06/heartbreaking-images-of-the-pets-left-behind-during-hurricane-katrina/?utm_term=.f110b89459ee) to Harvey (<http://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/stranded-pets-rescued-amid-hurricane-harvey-flooding-southeast/story?id=49465792>). Eicher, an evacuee during Hurricane Harvey, shouted to first responders, "We have two kids with down syndrome, a pig and a three-legged dog." The first responder's reply: "Sounds good, (let's) do this (<http://www.pressherald.com/2017/08/31/lesson-from-katrina-no-pet-left-behind/>)." During preparation for Hurricane Irma, hotels along the evacuation route accepted pets and waived pet fees to accommodate families. One hotel raved that they took in over 900 dogs (<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/florida-hotel-accommodated-nearly-1-153258928.html>) during the storm and reduced their pet cleaning fee from \$150 to \$50. But what about the families without a car, that cannot afford a hotel or the \$50 pet cleaning fee?

Twelve years after Hurricane Katrina, the evacuation of pets during natural disasters has improved (http://www.npr.org/2017/09/02/547972616/a-bipartisan-bill-helped-save-pets-from-harvey-and-maybe-their-humans-too?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=20170902). There are several factors that all evacuees must consider regardless of socio-economic status: transportation, gas (<http://www.businessinsider.com/hurricane-irma-2017-gas-stations-supply-prices-florida-2017-9>), shelter, special needs (https://www.theepochtimes.com/she-can-barely-walk-evacuating-for-irma-more-difficult-for-the-elderly_2294959.html) of family members, pets or other domesticated animals (<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=emotional+man+returns+home+after+evacuation+to+find+animals+alive&view=detail&mid=8D8430ECE4DBDF49E3158D8430ECE4DBDF49E315&FORM=VIRE>), time (<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/weather/hurricane/article173494726.html>), and cost (<https://www.thepennyhoarder.com/life/evacuation-support/>). PETS merely requires states to *consider* pets in their evacuation plans, not to *solve* the various issues which hinder families from evacuating with their pets. Without addressing such issues, many families are in the same position as Hurricane Katrina victims. The awareness of pet evacuation concerns from Hurricane Katrina to Maria has increased, but the coverage of the 2017 storms neglected to address the ongoing issues that plague underserved communities (<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/emergency/DisastersandPoverty.pdf>).



Photo by: Liz Roll Photo by Liz Roll – Sep 07, 2005 – Location: New Orleans, LA

Like Katrina (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/essential-facts-about-the-victims-of-hurricane-katrina>), if you live paycheck to paycheck (<http://www.refinery29.com/2017/08/169890/hurricane-harvey-why-people-dont-evacuate>) without a savings to fall back on, you have to stay and work for as long as possible. When you are ready to leave, it may be too late. (<http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-irma-naples-20170909-story.html>). Pet owners without a car may struggle to find public transportation to the nearest pet-friendly shelter. PETS does not require that all emergency shelters be pet-friendly. “There is a class issue (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/09/AR2005090901824.html>) involved here, (while) Marriott hotels welcomed the pets of Katrina evacuees as ‘part of the family,’ people who had to rely on the Red Cross for shelter were forced to abandon that part of the family or attempt to ride out the storm. It cannot be denied that many poor people are dead (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/09/AR2005090901824.html>) as a result of ‘no pets’ policies.” For the population that is most desperate for an improved policy, PETS falls short of their needs. Communication is a major barrier to meeting the needs of underserved communities and their pets during evacuation. While information (<https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/FEMAPetShelteringbestpractices2007.pdf>) and tips for families (<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/disaster-preparedness>) are available, access to these resources is not guaranteed. There are barriers (<https://aging.ny.gov/LivableNY/ResourceManual/PlanningZoningAndDevelopment/II1i.pdf>) to serving underserved communities and implementing plans to meet the needs of all families.

Pets For Life (http://www.humanesociety.org/about/departments/pets-for-life/what_is_pfl.html) (PFL), a Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) program, has bridged the gap between municipalities and underserved communities by utilizing grassroots outreach to build partnerships with families. PFL is designed specifically to “empower communities (<https://www.animalsheltering.org/page/tools-bring-pets-life-your-community>) that—because of economic, social, linguistic, or cultural factors—do not have

access to pet-care information, resources, (and) related services.” The disparity in services for these communities transcends to emergency evacuation. Emergency plans need to address these issues with a grassroots approach.

More than 30 (<https://www.animallaw.info/content/map-states-disaster-planning-laws>), states have passed legislation or adopted a plan to address pet evacuation in emergencies. States that have multi-billion dollar agriculture industries, like South Carolina (<https://www.animallaw.info/sites/default/files/South%20Carolina%20Annex%2017.pdf>), have more detailed plans for the evacuation of animals than states without an agricultural focus. Although the purpose of PETS is to ensure that all citizens are willing and able to evacuate to safety, the concern in developing plans is more centered on protecting business (<https://www.animallaw.info/sites/default/files/South%20Carolina%20Annex%2017.pdf>) than saving lives. PETS requirements are broad, and the implementation at the state and local level differs greatly from community to community. In the midst of emergencies, the public focus tends to be on punishment and shame, instead of solutions.

Today, unlike a Katrina society, where pets were pulled from their families and thrown off buses to die alone, society is quick to threaten prosecution for pets abandoned before a storm. During Hurricane Irma, residents were threatened to face felony charges (<https://topdogtips.com/dogs-left-hurricane-irma/>) after their dogs were found abandoned in backyards. One Animal Control Director said, “There is absolutely no excuse (<http://www.care2.com/causes/people-who-left-their-dogs-chained-during-irma-face-felony-charges.html>) for doing that.” But the pet owners did not face animal cruelty charges (<http://www.wptv.com/news/region-c-palm-beach-county/many-owners-of-animals-abandoned-during-hurricane-irma-will-not-face-charges>) because the animals were not abandoned, they were actually in the process of being evacuated.

In the chaos of the storm, animals can be misplaced or presumed to be forgotten. The typical response from the public is, “I would never leave my pets,” but this is disconnected from the actual experience of an emergency evacuation. One California fire (<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/10/09/santa-rosa-fire-how-a-sudden-firestorm-obliterated-a-city/>), evacuee, Christina, suddenly woke at 3 a.m. to a sky engulfed in flames. She grabbed her dogs and made it out of the neighborhood within four minutes. Minutes later, several homes in her neighborhood were burned to the ground. Some neighboring cats and dogs hid or ran in the chaos, leaving families with no option but to leave the doors open and hope their pets made it out (<http://thenewdaily.com.au/news/world/2017/10/15/dog-alive-california-fires/>).



Photo by: Liz Roll Photo by Liz Roll – Sep 07, 2005 – Location: New Orleans, LA

PETS, a break-through act for families and their pets in emergencies, has not solved the problems that initiated its conception. PETS was crucial in recognizing the power of the human-animal bond and the critical need for pet evacuation plans. States need to take a step back and re-evaluate their focus on pet policies. Implementation of grassroots outreach programs is essential to bridge the gap between the agenda of local and state evacuation plans and the vulnerable populations that the plans were meant to protect. “There is no power for change (<http://transactionswithbeauty.com/home/aaxd8kg2des47fx9h46jfetkf8bjkz>) greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

CATEGORIES GGU LAW REVIEW

Create a free website or blog at WordPress.com.