Chapter 17 - Lesson 2

Emergency Animal Management During Disasters

Introduction

Natural disasters such as hurricanes and wild fires continue to demonstrate how important it is to have local emergency and disaster management plans. Often, the need to care for livestock and family pets during emergencies is overlooked. Local jurisdictions must incorporate animal issues into their emergency management plans. This provision allows local authorities to determine ahead of time what they will do when disaster strikes.

Each county designates at least one individual as the local Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC). This person works with the mayor and/or the county judge, who may request assistance from the state through the Governor’s Division of Emergency Management (GDEM) if a situation is too much for the local jurisdiction to handle. The EMC works with others at the local level to address issues unique to that city and/or county and determine what should be done before, during, and after a disaster.

The local emergency management plan must include provisions for managing livestock, rescuing pets, or apprehending stray animals. It must also provide shelter for animals, quarantine those that might be diseased, dispose of (diseased or non-diseased)...)
carcasses, and provide medical assistance for sick and injured animals.

The management plan addresses animal disease outbreaks, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, and fires, as well as acts of terrorism and bioterrorism.

**Local Animal Issues Committee**

Each county is instructed to appoint a local animal issues committee (AIC) to assist in developing an animal management plan. Committee members might include county extension agents, veterinarians, veterinary technicians, agricultural science teachers, animal control officers, and any others who may contribute knowledge and expertise to the group.

The AIC and the EMC will work together to anticipate problems, and develop action plans for dealing with natural, accidental or intentional disasters.

**Local Animal Issues Plan**

Before drafting the plan, the committee should begin by discussing and making a list of the types of disasters that might affect the county. Members will need to address all natural, accidental and intentional disease issues as well as the non-disease issues that might occur in their area.

It is also important to distinguish between outbreaks of a foreign (or regulatory) animal disease and other disasters. If the State Animal Health Regulatory agency diagnoses a foreign animal disease, the agency will take control and direct the response. The role of the local AIC is to provide support for the animal health authorities on the scene. However, if there is a non-disease related disaster, local authorities will take control and provide the planned response. State and federal animal health authorities, in turn, will provide the AIC support.

Once the AIC has addressed the different types of disasters the committee should identify and divide the types of animals in the county into three categories:

- Livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats and swine)
- Companion animal (e.g., dogs, cats, horses, pocket pets and caged birds)
- Wildlife (e.g., deer and feral swine)

AIC members may be assigned a category of animals and develop a plan for their group in the event of an emergency. The plans are then merged into a single plan.

**Non-Disease Issues**

When developing a plan to address non-disease emergencies, the AIC needs to consider the following issues:

- Establishing the operations and communications system for the local Incident Command Post (ICP) for animal non-disease response activities
- Establishing a phone bank to respond to calls from the public
- Establishing a process for handling offers of assistance from the public (e.g., donations and volunteers)
- Developing appropriate procedures for responding to requests for help in sheltering, feeding and rescuing animals, and repairing areas such as animal enclosures
- Providing administrative and logistical support for animal-related emergencies or disasters (e.g., an overturned livestock truck or a hazardous materials accident nearby animals)
- Developing county profiles (including location, types, sizes and other agricultural demographics) of animal-related production, processing, marketing and carcass disposal facilities/operations
- Disseminating public information regarding animal-related issues
- Evacuating and transporting animals from actual or impending disaster locations
- Sheltering and caring for animals in holding facilities or other types of animal shelters (e.g., ones that are pet friendly, established or temporary) during and after emergencies and disasters
- Defining search and rescue capabilities.
- Capturing and holding of stray or lost animals affected by a disaster
- Planning for animal identification and relocation activities
- Providing medical care or humane euthanasia for animals injured in an emergency or disaster
- Handling wildlife nuisance situations
- Examining local economic impact issues
- Reporting animal-related damage assessment information to the animal issues representative in the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
Disease Issues

In disease-related emergencies, the AIC will cover numerous issues that are also in the non-disease plan, will address others that are unique to disease-related issues, and will provide key support to a state or deferral ICP for any regulatory disease situation. With a disease-related issue that is considered a foreign animal disease or a regulatory disease, the state and federal agencies will take the lead role and will implement parts of the county AIC plan as they are needed.

The following actions should be taken into consideration when writing the disease portion of the plan:

- Obtaining an appropriate facility and equipment (e.g., telephones, phone lines, and high-speed internet lines and connections) for a state/federal ICP
- Establishing a phone bank to respond to calls from the public
- Establishing a process for handling offers of assistance from the public (e.g., donations and volunteers)
- Developing appropriate procedures for responding to requests for help in sheltering, feeding and rescuing animals, and repairing such areas as animal enclosures
- Providing administrative and logistical support for animal disease response and eradication activities
- Developing county profiles (including location, types, sizes, and other agricultural demographics) of animal-related production, processing, marketing, and carcass disposal facilities/operations
- Supporting the procurement of appropriate equipment, chemicals and drugs for disease control and eradication operations
- Identifying an appropriate labor force pool
- Disseminating public information
- Responding to zoonotic public health issues (e.g., rabies vaccinations and West Nile encephalitis prevention)
- Helping to eradicate disease through cleaning and disinfection activities
- Supporting traffic control activities, including traffic flow within and nearby the quarantine area, and setting up signage and traffic barriers
- Obtaining appropriate equipment and vehicles for transportation of diseased animals and animal products from one location to another for slaughter and/or disposal
- Determining the number and location of appropriate disposal sites in the local area that could be used in an emergency to dispose of diseased carcasses to minimize the spread of the disease.
- Establishing and operating inspection, cleaning and disinfection stations
- Supporting depopulation and indemnification issues
- Determining vector and scavenger control activities

Carcass Disposal

The issue of carcass disposal impacts communities in disease and non-disease emergencies. Plans for both situations must address quarantining and containment activities (e.g., determining the number and location of appropriate local disposal sites that help with emergency disposal of diseased carcasses) to keep disease from spreading. The local AIC will work with the various state agencies to determine the methods used and identify the resources. There are specific laws that govern carcass disposal. These methods specify how the disposal will occur, if the animal can be moved, and if there is a certain location that will be more suitable for disposal.

Evacuation and Shelters

In many non-disease situations, a shelter needs to be established to house animals that are evacuated or that require protection from the weather. During evacuations, all types of animals might be temporarily relocated to an area until it is safe for them to return home after a disaster. The AIC emergency plan should address the following:

- Is there an appropriate animal representative at the local EOC to work with shelters and other facilities?
- Does the disaster or emergency warrant an evacuation? If so, where will the animals be moved?
- Do the animals need to be identified, tagged and photographed in order to be reunited with their owners? How will that be done? Is the appropriate equipment available (e.g., cameras and ID microchips)?
- Will the animals need sheltering? If so, what type of sheltering will they require (e.g., pet friendly shelters when their owners are in facilities in another location)? Are the shelters able to accommodate small, mixed and/or large animals?
Who is going to feed and care for the animals? Are there sufficient personnel for 24-hour operations?

Is the shelter(s) appropriately equipped to support the animals and personnel (e.g., animal cages, animal runs, water and food bowls, cleaning supplies, running water, electricity, heat and/or air conditioning, cooking facilities, porta potties, and showers)?

Have specific rules/procedures been established for each shelter regarding how long animals will be held before considering possible relocation to another facility, fostering, adoption, reuniting with owners, or euthanasia?

Is 24-hour security available for the animal shelters?

By whom and how will the animals be transported?

Should the animals be relocated to another area or moved out of state?

When developing plans for particular cities and the county, the AIC should identify individuals who can help with these situations should the need arise. For instance, an individual in the county who transports cattle for a living would be a logical person to ask for assistance if livestock needs to be evacuated. If the individual agrees to be a resource, the AIC would call the contact in an emergency to take charge of moving the animals.

Another area in which residents can help involves determining where to house evacuated animals. This could be handled by locating several people who agree to shelter animals on their own properties and care for them during emergencies. The AIC should maintain contact information for these volunteers so they can be reached at any time.

Once the committee develops a list of all individuals who have agreed to assist in the event of an emergency it should contact them periodically to ensure that they are still willing to assist.

**Simulative Exercises**

It is important for the local AIC to conduct exercises to test how the plan will work. The more familiar individuals are with the plan, the more smoothly it will be carried out if a disaster occurs. During these exercises, committee members will observe their plan in action and make appropriate changes in procedures and policies.

To ensure that operations run smoothly, the committee should prepare situation reports. These reports are useful during exercises and actual disasters because they help the committee keep track of what has occurred and what needs to be done.

In addition, the AIC should keep activity logs on all issues that are discussed. These documents, which should be accessible at any time, contain the disaster scenarios developed from either exercises or from real events. They outline what the committee considered doing in each situation and the action it took. Activity logs also help the group critique its actions and allow them to be better prepared for emergencies.

The local EMC may at times call a meeting of all the people involved in carrying out the emergency management plan. It is important that at least one member of the AIC attend these meetings to provide information if animal issues are discussed.

The ultimate objective for counties is to have an emergency plan that will help citizens along with local officials to prepare and deal effectively with an animal disaster. Development of a plan requires communication and creativity.

**Reference**


**Questions**

1. Describe the key components of local emergency plans for animal disasters.