

## The Role of Volunteers in Disasters

By Julie Atwood

Trained volunteers play critical roles in every disaster. Without them, shelters would be chaotic, unhealthy, and unsafe. Communications would be slow, and, in some cases, severely compromised. Food and services would be in short supply. And, animals would be underserved.



UCD Student-VERT rescue Koi during Nun's Fire

In the recent fires, community members sprang into action to evacuate, work in shelters, feed and water animals. In many instances, their efforts made a big difference to the welfare of animals and their owners.

However, there were circumstances in which officials turned away untrained, would-be rescuers, much to their frustration. Worse, and this occurs in almost every large-scale incident, the activities of self-deployed “spontaneous volunteers” create serious safety issues, disregarded rules, and placed themselves, first responders, owners, and animals in grave danger.

Unfortunately, there have been an increasing number of casualties caused by well-meaning people racing to respond to emergencies without an official request, permission, or knowledge of incident command or scene safety. Their actions put everyone at risk, and jeopardize the work of the recognized Animal Disaster Service Workers, CARTs and DARTs.

There are many ways to become a safe, trained, and responsible resource to help animals in emergencies and disasters. Every region has different organizational models, so it's important to start by learning who does what in your area.

Next, decide what type of service fits your skill set and availability, and join a group that's compatible with your goals and desire to help. Anyone can become a potential resource to first responders in many situations, IF YOU HAVE SOME BASIC LEARNING in the Incident Command System, an understanding of NIMS, and are willing to invest time in basic training and maintaining skills.

### **Here are some ways to get involved**

- Get in touch with your local fire service, Humane Society, or Volunteer Center to learn what's available.
- Study FEMA IC-100 & 200 at your own pace, and you, too, can be READY for WHATEVER.
- Become a volunteer at your local Animal Shelter
- Join a CERT or NERT program