



5001 Angel Canyon Road • Kanab, Utah 84741-5000 • (435) 644-2001 • www.bestfriends.org

Contact:

John Polis 435-644-2001 ext. 4858 or 435-817-2980 (cell), johnp@bestfriends.org

Barbara Williamson (435) 644-2001 ext. 4808 or 435-689-0200 (cell), barbara@bestfriends.org

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Best Friends Rescuers Discover Many Dead Animals Left Behind As Galveston Residents Fled Oncoming Wrath of Hurricane Ike

A Best Friends Animal Society search and rescue team in Galveston, Texas, has discovered grim reminders that a national law protecting pets threatened by a natural disaster is yet to accomplish what it was designed to do. Countless dead companion animals have been discovered in the days since Hurricane Ike, apparently left behind by fleeing residents.

"Many pets were just left behind to fend for themselves," said Paul Berry, chief executive officer of Best Friends Animal Society. "Any pet owner who willfully left their pet behind, chained up outside or left in crates, after advanced warnings of catastrophic flooding, should be charged to the fullest extent of animal cruelty laws in Texas."

Best Friends search and rescue personnel have been in Galveston since Monday night following a request for help from the Galveston County Health District Animal Control Shelter. The search team conducted a grid system assessment Wednesday and has begun rescuing animals and identifying areas where animals did not survive the storm.

In 2006 President Bush signed the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act which was designed to ensure that state and local emergency preparedness operational plans met the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following major disaster or emergency.

"It's shocking that after all the advance warnings and new legislation that people aren't better prepared to remove their animals when a storm approaches," Berry added. "The evidence of animals left behind cannot be denied. To see a dog who drowned at the end of a chain for no good reason is heartbreaking for animal welfare volunteers and government officials alike. Such careless, thoughtless neglect for another life is absolutely inexcusable."

Animals who have been discovered alive were confined by chains or left abandoned in homes and have been five or more days without food and water. On Wednesday, Best Friends rescuers picked up six animals—four dogs, a gray kitten, and a warhog. Best Friends will continue to search Galveston County for animals who survived the storm.

Best Friends rescue team members are searching street by street, talking with neighbors to find out if anyone knows of animals that might need to be rescued.

"The people here have been very welcoming and grateful that Best Friends is here," said Rich Crook, Best Friends' rapid response manager. "We're hoping to expand our rescue efforts to the Galveston Peninsula over the next several days."

Best Friends has extensive experience in natural disasters, highlighted by the organization's rescue of 6,000 dogs and cats during Hurricane Katrina. Best Friends rapid response teams also participated in the rescue of animals during floods in Mexico and severe earthquakes in Peru in the last 12 months.

"Kindness to Animals Builds a Better World for All of Us"