



SERVICE ANIMALS & PETS IN MASS CARE SETTINGS

In New Jersey, every municipality is required by state law to maintain a written, state-approved Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The EOP and its 16 annexes are all-hazards documents that outline how the town will coordinate resources, issue alerts, and recover from disasters. Two Annexes, Evacuation and Shelter, Reception & Care, require emergency managers to consider animals in their planning. Animals include several categories:

Service Dogs & Miniature Horses

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires evacuated handlers not to be separated from their service dogs and miniature horses. Dogs and miniature horses are the only types of animals permitted by the ADA. Service animals are trained to perform specific tasks for a single person with a disability.

Emergency planners may not separate handlers and their service animals from the general population in an emergency shelter.

Emotional Support Animals

The ADA does not cover emotional support animals (ESA). ESA have certain limited rights in public housing, but not in mass care shelters. Strictly speaking, ESA are pets.

Emergency planners, however, should recognize that a physician or psychologist prescribed some ESA to support an individual with emotional needs, especially in a crisis. A crisis can be personal or a widespread event that requires emergency sheltering. When possible, finding a strategy to keep ESA and their owners together in a shelter can help mitigate emotional and behavioral stress.

Therapy Animals

ADA also does not cover therapy animals. While considered working animals, they do not work for a single individual, unlike service dogs. Instead, therapy dogs are trained to work with multiple people. Therapy dogs are usually certified and insured by an association. Until they are working as a therapy dog under the association, they are considered pets.

Therapy dogs can have a significant impact in an emergency shelter, both for staff and evacuees. Emergency planners and shelter managers may consider making connections with therapy dog associations now. The emotional benefits of a therapy dog visit to emergency shelters can help with the stress levels in the shelter.

Pets

In the past, pets were not permitted in emergency shelters. History also shows that people will not evacuate, leaving their pets behind. In 2006, the [Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act \(PETS Act\)](#) was enacted, requiring local emergency managers to provide emergency shelter for household pets.

Emergency planners must have a plan to care for pets. Options can include a second building near the human evacuee shelter or a dedicated pet trailer. If a separate area in the same building is used, planners must consider heating, ventilation, and HVAC issues.

Livestock

There are still many farms and ranches in New Jersey that raise cows, horses, pigs, goats, various fowl, and exotics like emus and bison. Farmers and their animals face the same emergencies as other residents, perhaps more.

Farmers largely rely on other farmers during evacuations. Emergency planners in rural areas should plan to support the evacuation and relocation of livestock, possibly with access to veterinarians, farriers, feed, trailers, and portable corrals. There are also public health considerations for prompt removal and disposal of deceased livestock.

Evacuating and caring for all types of animals during emergencies presents many challenges for emergency planners. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is the lead agency to coordinate the management of animals in emergencies, in conjunction with [FEMA Emergency Support Function \(ESF\) 11](#). Additional resources are available, and it is recommended that emergency planners visit the sites below for information and resources.

- [FEMA Shelter Field Guide, FEMA P-785](#)
- [New Jersey Department of Agriculture - Animal Emergency](#)
- [New Jersey Service Animal Working Group](#)
- [New Jersey Animal Emergency Working Group Resources](#)

The Central Jersey Joint Insurance Fund hosted a roundtable with members of NJ Service Animal Working Group about Animals in Mass Care Settings. The recording is available on [MSI Videos](#) in the Video Briefing section.

Public education is the critical first step in caring for all the classes of animals in a disaster. Residents should understand that they bear the ultimate responsibility for their animals. They should make plans to avoid going to shelters. However, for many people, shelters are the only or best option available to them, their families, and their animals. Public education should also prepare residents with animals with what to expect at the shelter and what is expected from them.