

NC State vets lead way in disaster response for animals

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Ultraviolet powder is used to detect breaks in biosecurity. The glowing residue indicates transmission of an infectious agent, alerting the responder to take measures necessary to contain the outbreak. Credit: Wendy Savage, North Carolina State University

Most people can picture the first responders who come to the rescue in the wake of a natural disaster. But who provides emergency help for the dogs, cats and horses that people love? And who takes care of the cows, poultry and hogs that form the backbone of animal agriculture? North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine is helping to fill the need through a unique initiative that requires all of its students to receive disaster training, providing a new generation of leaders in veterinary medicine and disaster response.

"This training program is important because there is a real need to build our capacity to respond to disasters," says Dr. Dianne Dunning, co-author of a recent study on NC State's landmark training requirement and director of the university's Animal Welfare, Ethics and Public Policy Program. "Emergency response is generally geared towards people, particularly at the local level. We need to protect the health of the people and the health of the animals - whether they are pets or livestock related to a region's livelihood. We believe this training will help veterinarians respond to the needs of both people and animals.

"NC State has the only college of [veterinary medicine](#) that requires all of its students to take a formal disaster response training program, and we hope this is a model for others to follow," Dunning says. Students, who must take the program to graduate, earn advanced state and federal disaster training certifications.

The training program deals with a variety of disaster response issues associated with a staggering array of animals. Students are taught how to work with displaced people and their pets. For example, learning how to set up and operate mobile animal shelters that can be located near emergency shelters for displaced people.



As Hurricane Katrina unfortunately demonstrated, the family pet may require emergency attention during a disaster. The NC State University College of

Veterinary Medicine is preparing all graduates to be federally credentialed first responders. Credit: North Carolina State University

Students are also taught how to respond to an epidemic in livestock in order to stop disease from spreading - a crucial step in preventing disruption of local and regional economies that depend on animal agriculture. Preventive measures include quarantining animals, as well as ensuring that veterinarians, farmers and others don't spread the disease on their clothes or shoes.

But the disaster training is not limited to dealing with animals - it extends to overarching planning and response. "The course gives our students the skills they need to become leaders in their communities when it comes to disaster response," Dunning says. "The training touches on a host of skills required in the wake of a disaster: fundamental psychology, effective communication, hazardous material handling, and the ability to anticipate, identify, and respond to new needs as they crop up."

The training program is part of the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine's "One Medicine" philosophy, which focuses on the belief that human and animal health rely on overlapping fields of scientific and medical knowledge, and related fields of research.

The paper outlining the emergency response training program was published in the fall issue of the *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*.

Source: North Carolina State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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