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THE F.O.U.N.D. ACT

AB 478

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE



AB 478 Implementation Guide

AB 478

- On October 13, 2025, Governor Newsom signed [AB 478](#) into law.
- This legislation requires that California cities and counties update their emergency plans to designate procedures for a person with a residence in a mandatory evacuation area—or their representative—to rescue their pet.
- The legislation also requires a city or county to update its emergency plan **to designate a person or entity** for a person with a residence in a mandatory evacuation area **to call** if the person is **in need of assistance** with pets during and after an evacuation.
- Additionally, the city or county will post the contact information for the designated persons or entities to assist persons in need of rescue assistance for their pets.
- According to the legislation, for at least 30 days the city or county is prohibited from making available for adoption, euthanizing, or transferring a pet that was rescued from a mandatory evacuation area. After 30 days has passed, the bill would prohibit the pet from being euthanized or transferred out of the custody of the local animal control agency unless all local rescue and foster partners have been notified and given an opportunity to take custody of the pet.

Why This Law Matters

- Given California's susceptibility to earthquakes and increasing likelihood of fires amidst climate change, cities and counties must prepare for upcoming disasters for both its people and animals alike.
- During emergency evacuations, many pets are unfortunately left behind because:
 - Animal owners are not home at the time the evacuation began.
 - There is a lack of equipment needed to evacuate the animals.
 - Animals are difficult to catch in the timeframe needed to comply with the evacuation order.
- In 2021, the American Veterinary Medical Association found that [57.2%](#) of California households own at least one pet.
- Today, pets are family. In a 2023 Pew Research Center showed that 97% of Americans believe their pet is a part of their family with half saying their animals are as much a family member as a human member is.



- During the recent 2025 fires in Los Angeles and Pasadena, jurisdictions lacked a unified procedure to properly coordinate pet rescues from evacuated homes, resulting in unofficial entry by residents and rescuers to save peoples' pets in time.
- Jurisdictions will benefit from a formalized, coordinated, and consistent system that prevents animal deaths during emergencies and facilitates a quicker reunion with pets and their families.

Because pets are our family and too many were left to suffer in January during the Southern California fires, it is crucial that jurisdictions implement an effective and coordinated plan for animal rescue during emergencies.

AB 478 Model Implementation Guide

(1) Designated Procedure

In compliance with AB 478, this jurisdiction shall update its emergency plans to adopt procedures for residents of the evacuated areas or their representative to access the evacuated area in order to rescue any pets left behind per the following:

(A) Partnerships

Jurisdictions that have best ensured the safety and rescue of local pets have done so by implementing an animal emergency response system in advance and by utilizing systems that allow residents and rescuers to report animal incidents and monitor emergencies. In partnering with animal rescue teams, jurisdictions are prepared when disaster strikes.

Jurisdictions are recommended to partner with leaders in the disaster response field, such as: Shelterly and California Community Animal Response Teams ("Cal CARTs").

(i) Shelterly

Shelterly is a "disaster response operating system that helps streamline tracking and management efforts, increasing efficiency while allowing responders to focus on what truly matters—ensuring the safety and well-being of every animal."¹ Specifically, this technology facilitates preparedness training and mutual aid that may be delivered to communities, animal shelters, and animal response teams.

Residents seeking to report an animal incident during an emergency may report through Shelterly's system, which utilizes hotlines and geographic pins to facilitate the deployment of trained volunteers and emergency responders to the animal incident.

¹ <https://www.shelterly.org>



Ultimately, Shelterly's technology and experience in animal rescue and emergency response has created a more efficient method to rescuing animals during evacuations while also keeping human rescuers safe.

As of 2025, Shelterly has assisted over 7,000 animals, deployed 1,000 volunteers, partnered with over 12 organizations, and served over 20 counties in California. All jurisdictions are recommended to have a formal Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with Shelterly to better guarantee volunteers know where and how to respond to an animal incident before, during, and after emergencies.

(ii) Cal CARTs

California Community Animal Response Teams ("Cal CARTs") is an umbrella organization of a network of animal emergency response that oversees a more strategic system responding to animal incidents during disasters, evacuations, and emergencies across California.²

Cal CARTs was established through the efforts of the North Valley Animal Disaster Group ("NVADG"), which has been a leader in animal emergency rescue since the 1990's and currently serves as a Cal CART, Napa CART, Solano CART, Sonoma CART, and numerous other well-established CARTs.³ Additionally, Cal CARTs operates in collaboration with the following entities to provide disaster response for animals: California Office of Emergency Services ("Cal OES"),⁴ the California Department of Food and Agriculture ("CDFA"),⁵ and the California Veterinary Emergency Team ("CVET").⁶

A county or city that partners with Cal CART may partner with a preexisting organization or establish a new organization to serve as the local CART. A CART can be established through Animal Control, a non-governmental animal rescue partner, the sheriff's department, city council, or the Cal OES.

The following organizations are examples of groups that serve as CARTs in various counties across California: San Diego Humane Society, SPCA Los Angeles, Horse Emergency Evacuation Team, SoCal Animal Response Team, and Central California Animal Disaster Response Team.⁷

² <https://www.calcarts.org>

³ <https://www.nvadg.org>; <https://www.nvadg.org/nvadg-history/>

⁴ <https://www.caloes.ca.gov>

⁵ <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov>

⁶ <https://cvet.vetmed.ucdavis.edu>

⁷ The following link provides a full list of Cal CARTs: <https://www.calcarts.org/cart-members>



Although each CART may be represented by a different animal organization in each county, all CARTs operate under a uniform system of procedures for animal rescue. This standardized approach in all local CARTs is accomplished by Cal CART hosting meetings and summits as well as working with state agencies, developing standardized training resources and exercises for volunteers, supporting funding efforts, and developing “standardized animal tracking and reunification software specific to CART operational roles including hotline, evacuation, sheltering, dispatching response teams, and reunifying animals with their owners.”⁸ Specifically, on its website, Cal CART provides species specific task sheets,⁹ technology resources,¹⁰ animal care resources,¹¹ and sample MOUs.¹² Currently, almost thirty counties in California have their own local CART.

Nevada County implemented a Cal CART through its sheriff’s department, known as [Sheriff’s Humane Emergency Animal Rescue Team](#) (“Sheriff’s HEART”).¹³ The Sheriff’s office partnered with trained volunteers from the community to form HEART, which conducts animal rescues and evacuations during emergencies. HEART’s deployment structures align with the strategies of California’s Office of Emergency Services as well as the California Animal Response Emergency Support (“CARES”), the Cal CARTS, and Cal Animals.

Historically, animal rescues during evacuations have been conducted by a combination of animal control officers, nonprofits, veterinarians, volunteers, and community members. However, HEART has found that cities and counties lack a unified structure to connect these rescuers during emergencies. Additionally, there is no statewide credentialing system or a classification system that enables counties or cities to request qualified animal rescue teams. Rather, many volunteers are untrained civilians, which creates unnecessary risks and is less effective. HEART was formed to better unify rescuers with a formalized and coordinated strategic procedure for emergencies.

Although HEART is Nevada County’s CART, this program is especially informative and serves as a model jurisdictional partner because it works with local sheriffs to further ensure effectiveness and compliance with the law.

The HEART model’s effectiveness is due to its partnership with the local Sheriff Office and because HEART actively conducts trainings for volunteers. Volunteers and staff have

⁸ <https://www.calcart.org/mission>

⁹ <https://www.calcart.org/field-services-resources>

¹⁰ <https://www.calcart.org/technology-resources>

¹¹ <https://www.calcart.org/animal-care-resources>

¹² <https://www.calcart.org/financial-admin-resources>

¹³ <https://www.sheriffsheart.org>; <https://www.nevadacountyca.gov/3844/Animal-Rescue-HEART>



been trained by emergency responders and skilled animal rescuers to address animal incidents during emergencies with more strategy. Sheriff's HEART requires the following basic trainings for volunteers: (a) Incident Command System and CalTopo Training, (b) fire awareness training, (c) small and large animal handling and behavior training, and (d) truck and trailer training.¹⁴ These trainings and courses are discussed more below.

CARTs are effective because these programs aim to standardize trainings, equipment, and procedures for animal rescue during an emergency and ensure that volunteers that are deployed during evacuations are informed and trained in advance. Additionally, when a city or county has a local CART, this ensures that the county is self-sufficient and does not necessarily need to rely on external assistance for animal rescues.

(iii) Animal Shelters and Rescues

Alternatively, some counties or cities may prefer to utilize existing animal rescue partners without forming a local CART. Jurisdictions may choose to develop emergency procedures with and deploy their own Animal Control. Given that Animal Control is a governmental entity and has a preexisting partnership with the jurisdiction, a jurisdiction's engagement with Animal Control is essential even when a separate CART has been chosen. Animal Control oversees staff that are trained in animal rescue and maintains shelter sites for rescued animals, which makes its participation crucial to ensuring animals rescued from an emergency will be housed, fed, and provided with medical care.

Cities or counties may also choose to partner with an animal rescue group to ensure animals are properly rescued and housed during an evacuation order. As opposed to an animal shelter, an animal rescue is a non-governmental entity that rescues animals. Given the animal rescue's experience with rescuing and housing animals, cities or counties that do not have a local animal shelter are encouraged to partner with a local animal rescue.

If a city or county partners with an animal shelter or rescue without establishing a CART, these entities are encouraged to train their employees in emergency animal response and to develop an internal plan for an evacuation order.

In summary:

The designated person or entity is urged to partner and sign an MOU with the following organizations:

- Shelterly
- Cal CARTs
- Animal Rescues

¹⁴ <https://www.nevadacountyca.gov/3844/Animal-Rescue-HEART>



Additionally, given the expertise and enforcement capabilities of sheriffs, county sheriff departments must consider implementing a HEART into their current law enforcement system.

(B) Partnership Structure and Roles

When a county or city establishes a Sheriff's HEART or Cal CART, the entity should form the following Animal Emergency Response ("AER") roles, as recommended by Sheriff's HEART¹⁵:

- **AER Field Animal Care Specialist ("Field ACS")**
 - **Role Description:** "Field ACS personnel provide proper handling, capture, containment, assessment, documentation, and wellness monitoring for animals in the field. They also maintain biosecurity standards, operate radios, and determine whether animals should shelter in place or be evacuated."
 - **Importance:** "During major wildfires, civilians frequently enter danger zones in an attempt to rescue animals. A standardized ACS Field role would ensure that only trained and credentialed responders conduct these operations."
- **AER Shelter Animal Care Specialist ("Shelter ACS")**
 - **Role Description:** "Shelter ACS team members care for animals in temporary emergency shelters. They provide feeding, watering, enrichment, sanitation, health monitoring, biosecurity procedures, and documentation."
 - **Importance:** "Large evacuations produce significant numbers of displaced animals. Without trained shelter teams, shelters can become overcrowded or unsafe."
- **AER Animal Transport Teams**
 - **Role Description:**
 - Type 1
 - "Type 1 transporters can enter immediate threat areas and haul trailers."

¹⁵ <https://www.sheriffsheart.org/post/why-california-needs-an-animal-emergency-response-aer-system-and-how-the-sheriff-s-heart-nonprofit>



- Type 2
 - “Type 2 transporters operate in warm zones where the threat is reduced but still present.”
- Type 3
 - “Type 3 transporters operate in cold zones and often transport small animals or equipment.”
- **Importance:**
 - “Entering or crossing evacuation lines without training can create significant hazards. Typed animal transport teams would ensure that only qualified responders move animals during emergencies.”
- **AER Animal Search and Rescue Technicians (“ASAR Land and Water”)**
 - **Role Description:** “ASAR technicians locate and rescue animals that are trapped, injured, or stranded. They use specialized training such as rope systems, technical extrication, hazard assessment, and in the case of ASAR Water, swiftwater and flatwater rescue skills.”
 - **Importance:** “Animals often become trapped in collapsed structures, ravines, waterways, or hazardous environments. Without ASAR technicians, civilians frequently attempt rescues that place themselves and responders in danger.”
- **AER Communication Roles**
 - **Role Description:** “These responders set up and manage radios, internet equipment, and communications support at AER command bases or in the field. Includes Communications Technicians, Communications Unit Leaders, Radio Operators for Field and Command.”
 - **Importance:** “Animal response teams often operate in areas with limited visibility, poor cell service, or evolving hazards. Without communications staff, teams can be left without updates or unable to request help.”
Additionally, one unified communication system should be utilized, rather than forcing volunteers and leaders to check multiple social media platforms and inboxes.
- **AER Shelter Managers for Large and Small Animals**
 - **Role Description:** “Shelter Managers oversee all temporary shelter operations. They manage staffing, supervise animal care, coordinate veterinary needs, oversee biosecurity and sanitation, maintain



documentation, and ensure that intake and reunification processes run properly.”

- **Importance:** “Large scale sheltering operations require experienced leadership. Without trained Shelter Managers, shelters risk disorganization or disease spread.”
- **AER Incident Support Team (IST)**

- **Role Description:** “The IST provides operational support and subject matter expertise for incidents that exceed local capacity. IST members may include specialists in operations, planning, logistics, communications, finance, safety, and public information.”
- **Importance:** “Major disasters such as the Camp Fire or Dixie Fire overwhelm local resources. A statewide IST would provide crucial management support.”

(C) Procedure Considerations

During an emergency, the county or city should follow the emergency procedures of the partnered organizations (such as Shelterly, Cal CART, and Sheriff’s HEART) that are informed on emergency animal rescues. However, below are considerations for improving human and animal safety during emergency rescues, adapted from the informative guidelines of Sheriff’s HEART.¹⁶

• Formal Structure for Volunteers

- Animal response teams have found that during emergencies, jurisdictions tend to lack a formalized system for animal rescues. Community members created their own improvised rescue procedures, which left volunteers confused, dependent on social media, and unsure of what actions were lawful.
- Jurisdictions must utilize Incident Command Systems (“ICS”) and other forms of centralized dispatch to coordinate where volunteers should check-in, where they should be deployed, who should supervise them, how to receive assignments, what safety rules apply, and how they can communicate with trained leadership.

• Correctly Deploying Skilled Volunteers

¹⁶ <https://www.sheriffsheart.org/post/why-california-needs-the-sheriff-s-heart-model-lessons-from-the-palisades-wildfires>



- Volunteers who are already skilled trailer drivers, trained animal emergency responders, and veterinarians are often willing to help, but according to HEART often lack a “safe, organized way to do so.”
- To properly utilize these skilled volunteers, jurisdictions must train or qualify these volunteers prior to an emergency and ensure that the volunteers
 - Have been vetted and / or credentialed
 - Included in the ICS
 - Receive assignments based on their particular skills, expertise, or experience
 - Have been informed on safety protocols
 - Have been provided with or advised on the proper equipment (such as fire resistant pants and shirts, fire resistant boots, helmets, masks, eye protection, and gloves)
- HEART emphasizes that these volunteers, despite their expertise and value, should not be pushed to exhaustion, made unsafe, or left unsupervised or unprotected.
- **Administering Training for Volunteers**
 - **Sheriff's HEART** *requires* the following training:
 - Incident Command System and CalTopo Training, fire awareness training, small and large animal handling and behavior training, and truck and trailer training.¹⁷
 - Courses:
 - General volunteers: Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”) IS-100 and 200
 - Advanced volunteers: ICS-300
 - Many **Cal CARTs** entities *require* volunteers to take the following courses, which are administered by ResQFAST:
 - (1) All-Hazards Safety Awareness (four hours) and
 - (2) General Fire Safety Awareness (two hours)¹⁸

¹⁷ <https://www.nevadacountyca.gov/3844/Animal-Rescue-HEART>

¹⁸ <https://www.resqfast.com/courses>



- All volunteers are also *recommended* to take other courses, including but not limited to:
 - (1) FEMA IS-10, 11, 111, and 700 and
 - (2) Human Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (“CPR”) and First Aid
- In addition to the above, **NVADG** *recommends* volunteers take the following courses:
 - IS-29, IS-42, and IS 244-B¹⁹
 - NVADG encourages volunteers to take an “Annual Refresher” course
- **Multi-Species Specialized Training**
 - According to the LA Times, some animal species were left behind during the Palisades fires because “responders lacked species-specific skills or safe handling knowledge.”
 - Dogs, cats, horses, goats, sheep, and exotics all require distinct handling during emergencies.
 - Therefore, according to HEART, when emergency animal volunteers are trained they should be trained in the following:
 - Horse handling and trailering
 - Livestock movement
 - Small animal behavior
 - Technical rescue support
 - Sheltering, intake, and triage
- **Long-Term Placement**
 - After emergency rescue, animals need transportation, sheltering, and coordinated placement.
 - According to CNN, communities had to build these systems last minute during the Palisades fires.
 - Prior to emergencies, jurisdictions should understand and manage the following:

¹⁹ <https://www.nvadg.org/training-guidelines/>



- Shelter staffing
- Animal tracking
 - Rescuers or shelters must label the origin of the rescued animal and track whether and where they have been transported
- Resource allocation
- Transportation logistics
- Inter-agency partnerships
- Reunification
- **Hotline**
 - As stated above, a proper system for communication must be determined and shared with volunteers. In addition to a communication platform for volunteers, residents must be able to call a hotline to report an animal incident, speak with shelters about reunification, or to volunteer themselves for rescues.
 - A jurisdiction should post a hotline phone number on its website and its designated animal shelter's website. Jurisdictions may utilize a hotline developed by their partner or the designated animal shelter entity may share its own hotline with the public.
- **Summary: Specific California Needs**
 - Coordinated dispatch
 - Trained trailer teams
 - Multi-species handlers
 - Safe volunteer integration
 - Animal Control Officer ("ACO") reinforcement
 - ICS communication
 - Logistical manpower
 - Public evacuation compliance
 - Long-term sheltering assistance
- **Website**



- Each county or city must maintain a webpage on its website specifically for the rescue of pets during an evacuation order.
- The considerations for this webpage are listed below in (3).
- **Implement Procedures into Emergency Operation Plan**
 - Once the jurisdiction has formalized its partnerships and developed procedures that include timelines, details on trainings, systems of communication, and relevant roles, these procedures should be implemented into the county or city's Emergency Operation Plan ("EOP").
 - These procedures should be properly distinguished and labeled as an emergency plan *for animals* during an evacuation order.
 - Additionally, these procedures should be posted and shared online for public knowledge.
 - Prepare liability waiver.

(2) Designated Person or Entity

Per AB 478, every county or city in California must designate a person or entity for a person with a residence in an area subject to an evacuation order or their designated representative to call if the person is in need of information regarding evacuating pets during an evacuation.

The county or city should designate a general entity for residents to call regarding evacuating pets during an evacuation such as the local animal control agency. However, the designated entity should partner with Shelterly and Cal CARTS to develop an internal emergency plan.

Additionally, each county or city should consider allocating a portion of its AB 478 compliant webpage for a submission form where residents may individually designate a person or entity to evacuate their pet during an evacuation order.

(3) Website

The jurisdiction is required to make available to the public, by posting the following information on its internet website:

- Each county or city should include the following in its webpage allocated to implementation of AB 478:



- Description of the county or city's partners, such as Shelterly, Cal CART, or other animal emergency team organizations, with a link to each partner's site.
- Animals that have been rescued solely since an evacuation order within or near the evacuated region should be featured on the webpage with a photo, a description of where the animal was found, the animal's current location, and any identifying characteristics.
- Contact information for the local animal control and shelters within the county or city, as well as a link to the entity's own website.
- Hotline listed for residents to report animal incidents.
- Form for residents to volunteer for an animal emergency response team.
- Form for residents to individually designate a person to evacuate their pets.

(4) 30 Day Holding Period

Per AB 478, animal control agencies, shelters, rescues, or fosters are prohibited from adopting out, euthanizing, or transferring out of custody for 30 days a pet rescued or originating from an area subjected to an evacuation order.

However, a local animal control agency may transfer a pet to an **in-state** partner animal shelter, animal rescue, or animal foster during the 30-day period if the local animal control agency maintains records of the location of the pet in order to facilitate owner reunification.

Additionally, after the 30-day period has passed, a pet described in paragraph (1) shall not be euthanized if an animal rescue organization has previously notified the local animal control agency of their willingness to take custody of the pet and completes that transfer upon the conclusion of the 30-day period.

This section of AB 478 does not apply to a pet that is irremediably suffering, or a pet that was relinquished or surrendered by its owner.

It is recommended that animal control agencies, shelters, rescues, and fosters inform staff and volunteers of this policy, and that entities post the policy on their website as well as around the premises of the animal control agency, shelter, rescue, or foster.