



## RSPCA involvement in flooding

Over many years the RSPCA has had a major involvement in many flood situations. As an organisation we have a mission statement that states “The RSPCA as a charity will, by all lawful means, prevent cruelty, promote kindness to and alleviate suffering of animals.”

To work to this mission statement in flooding situations we have a responsibility to rescue animals directly affected by the floods where there is no other persons either doing this, or with the experience, expertise and/or resources to do so.

We also work with animal owners and keepers to provide care for their animals, whether in flood waters, in situations where flood waters are causing problems indirectly, or away from the scene of the event in such places as prepared rest centres.

The RSPCA will also become involved in situations where animal owners and keepers do not discharge their particular duty of care toward animals and expose them to risk and suffering. In these cases the Society’s inspectorate may well investigate a set of circumstances to establish whether or not an offence against animal welfare legislation has taken place.

In carrying out the functions listed above the Society’s staff will work closely with other agencies to ensure the most effective service is provided, that is informed by the prevailing and often changing circumstances, and is carried out with full safety considerations in place. We will work with other agencies to follow the development of any situation being aware of predicted future circumstances.

Experience has shown that in emergency situations our staff have been called upon to help human victims as well as animal victims. In the Gloucester floods, working with the fire and rescue services our flood teams rescued 62 people as well as 5450 animals. Going back to the Towyn floods our officers provided for people who were still in their homes.

The Wales region has a flood rescue team membership of 18 officers when fully staffed. These are RSPCA inspectors and animal collection officers. These officers are trained to Swiftwater rescue technician level 1 (Rescue 3 international). This is a recognised qualification and is reassessed every three years. This level of training allows us to work with fire and rescue when necessary. The officers are fully equipped with personal issue. The level of training and equipment is regularly reviewed and has been upgraded following the Gloucestershire flooding event.

Across England and Wales the Society has approximately 100 trained officers. In larger and more prolonged flooding events the Society will task officers from across its workforce to attend any particular flood situation. We will also back these staff up with dry officers who will co-ordinate on a local and national basis from our control and co-ordination room based at our headquarters building. Communication systems are such that the location of this office-based control does not disadvantage our response. RSPCA inspectorate officers use the airwaves radio system, which can be set up into talk groups such as our flood response team. The radio system can be set up to allow joint communications with other organisations that also use the airwaves communications system, such as the police and fire and rescue.

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## Cymdeithas Frenhinol Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Our flood teams have the use of inflatable boats that have been purchased with use in flood situations in mind. These are Avon ERB 380s with 10 HP engines and Jenneau rigiflex 360 boats with 15 HP engines.

Front line response will entail our officers entering onto floodwaters to access animals, usually farm livestock, that are directly caught up in the floods. For example at a flood situation in Mold we removed 80+ sheep from floodwater. We carried them three or four at a time in our inflatable boats away from the floodwater. In other situations we will herd the animals and move them to higher ground, or away from the floodwaters. At Towyn we rescued domestic animals from their homes that were under flood.

In working closely with other agencies in the event of larger flooding situations, the Society will place an officer in Gold Command centres. We will also have forward co-ordinating officers and our flood trained officers on the water, who will be in teams of four. We will have our own RSPCA located control room which will deal with staff rotation, staff health and safety, and logistics e.g. booking accommodation. We will also ensure that our press office are kept fully up to date with the ongoing situation, and where applicable that they liaise closely with other agencies involved.

Other areas of front line response has been to enter evacuated areas in order to access those animals left behind by owners unable to remove them at the time that they left. This may also involve caring for animals in situ if removing them is not a viable option at that time.

RSPCA staff are involved in prepared rest centre planning and use. In emergency evacuation situations many animal owners take their animals with them. If these people are evacuated to rest centres the animals need to be catered for. We are not always in a position to take on the full responsibility for these animals, and indeed this is not what is asked of us. However, animals at rest centres do bring with them a series of considerations. The welfare issues of feeding, any necessary treatment, exercise, and containment need to be looked at. As do other issues such as health and safety and hygiene. At present the Society is setting up a system where we can potentially have use of our trained animal centre staff and volunteers in rest centres in order to release our more multi-skilled staff to attend the front line incident. This improvement has arisen from experience learnt in past floods.

Another aspect of animal welfare within flood situations is that of the responsibility of animal owners to make plans and to provide for their animals. There are areas that are known for the likelihood of flooding. Indeed some smaller floods occur regularly year in and year out. In these cases where livestock are affected there is a clear responsibility on the part of the keeper and owner to ensure the welfare of the animals during these flood events. Unfortunately some animal keepers do not discharge this responsibility and despite prior experience and warning, still allow their stock to suffer and often drown as a result of flooding. In these cases our inspectors will investigate to establish whether any animal welfare offences have been committed as a result of the failure to provide for the welfare of the stock.

In past events we have, via our control room, sourced help and supplies that may be useful in controlling or relieving the emergency situation. A noteworthy example of this occurred in the Gloucester floods when we were taking and arranging for water to be taken into the flood areas so that livestock had potable drinking water, rather than having to risk the polluted floodwaters. On that occasion this proved to be of great benefit to dairy farmers isolated by the flooding.

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The Society run tabletop exercises to test our response ability. One such exercise has recently been run to test our current communications capability across England and Wales. Regular wet refresher training of our flood officers also takes place.

We are also aware of areas that do create difficulty and look to overcome or ameliorate these as much as possible. In larger flood situations we may well draft officers in from across the Society's inspectorate operations. This can lead to difficulty in sourcing accommodation as close the site of operations as we would like to get. Similarly providing food and water to our front line staff can be problematic in terms of refreshments through the day. This can be as a result of local shops and business either selling out or lacking in deliveries due to the break down in road communications. In a similar vein the sourcing of fuel for our boats can be a local issue that will need to be resolved should it become problematic at any flooding event.

The RSPCA is currently reviewing its entire emergency response across all eventualities. This is an ongoing piece of work and one senior staff member has the responsibility to undertake this. As a result we would look to provide a more efficient response to emergency events that we become involved in.

Within the confines of our limited resource, the Society will always look for involvement in emergency planning, and would always seek early warning of any impending emergency situation.

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