



## Professional Standard 12 – Crisis Management and Emergency Response (Summary)

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## 1. Purpose

This standard ensures that WAFA members maintain comprehensive preparedness and deliver effective, timely responses to emergencies affecting working animals, handlers, staff, and facilities. The goal is to minimise harm, protect wellbeing, and maintain continuity of care during all crisis situations.

## 2. Scope

This standard applies to all WAFA members, including individuals, organisations, facilities, and programs involved in training, handling, housing, or supporting working animals. It encompasses preparation, response, recovery, and communication in the event of emergencies such as natural disasters, medical incidents, accidents, or facility failures.

## 3. Standard Statement

Members must develop, implement, and regularly update robust emergency management plans that prioritise animal and human safety. These plans must include clear evacuation procedures, communication protocols, access to veterinary emergency care, and arrangements for uninterrupted care. All personnel must receive ongoing training and participate in drills to ensure readiness. Effective communication channels must be maintained for coordinated response. Post-emergency, members must ensure recovery support for animals and handlers, including psychological and medical care.

## 4. Definitions

- **Emergency:** Any unforeseen event that poses immediate risk to health, safety, welfare, or continuity of operations, including natural disasters, accidents, or medical crises.
- **Evacuation:** The organized removal of animals and people from a hazardous area to a safer location.
- **Continuity of Care:** The ongoing provision of essential animal care and handler support during and after emergencies.
- **Emergency Drill:** A simulated exercise to practice emergency response procedures and improve preparedness.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Board:** Responsible for governance, setting strategic direction, risk management, financial oversight, and compliance with WAFA standards.
- **Senior Leadership:** Implements board policies and manages day-to-day operations.
- **Staff and Volunteers:** Support organisational objectives under leadership direction and adhere to governance policies.

## 6. Emergency Preparedness

WAFA Members must develop, maintain, and rigorously update comprehensive emergency response plans that are specifically tailored to the unique risks and operational contexts of their organisations. These plans must encompass a wide spectrum of potential emergencies, including but not limited to natural disasters such as bushfires, floods, cyclones, severe storms, and earthquakes; medical emergencies affecting either animals or personnel; facility infrastructure failures (e.g., power outages, structural damage); accidents; and other critical incidents that may disrupt normal operations or threaten safety.

Key elements of these emergency response plans must include:

- **Evacuation Planning:** Clearly mapped, well-marked evacuation routes that ensure the safe and efficient movement of animals, handlers, staff, and visitors to designated assembly points. Plans must accommodate animals with special needs and individuals with disabilities, ensuring accessible routes and appropriate handling protocols. These routes should be regularly inspected and rehearsed.
- **Emergency Coordination:** Identification and assignment of trained emergency coordinators with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Contact details for these coordinators, along with those of local emergency services (fire, police, ambulance), veterinary emergency providers, animal welfare authorities, and other relevant agencies, must be maintained and regularly updated.
- **Safety and Wellbeing Protocols:** Procedures that prioritise the physical and psychological safety of both animals and humans during all phases of an emergency, including pre-incident preparedness, active response, and post-incident recovery. These protocols should address animal containment, handling stress reduction, emergency first aid, and mental health considerations for handlers and staff.
- **Facility and Equipment Security:** Measures to secure buildings, kennels, enclosures, feed supplies, medical equipment, and other critical infrastructure against damage or loss during emergencies. This includes protocols for shutting down utilities safely, protecting hazardous materials, and safeguarding critical records and data.
- **Communication Strategies:** Inclusion of detailed communication plans for timely and clear dissemination of information among all stakeholders during emergencies, with provisions for backup communication systems in case of primary failures.
- **Training and Review:** Regular staff training sessions and emergency drills to familiarise all personnel with procedures, responsibilities, and the use of emergency equipment. The emergency plans must be reviewed at least annually or after any significant event to incorporate lessons learned, changes in operations, or emerging risks.

By instituting these thorough emergency preparedness measures, WAFA Members can significantly reduce risks, safeguard animal and human welfare, and ensure organisational resilience in the face of diverse crisis scenarios.

## 7. Training and Drills

- All personnel involved in the care, handling, and management of working animals and their environments—including staff, volunteers, and handlers—are required to participate in comprehensive and mandatory training programs focused on emergency preparedness and response. This training must be conducted upon induction and followed by regular refresher sessions to ensure up-to-date knowledge and readiness.
- Training programs should cover a broad range of topics including:
- **Emergency Roles and Responsibilities:** Clear understanding of individual and team roles during emergencies, including evacuation coordinators, animal handlers, communication leads, and safety officers.
- **Practical Response Skills:** Hands-on training in procedures such as safe animal evacuation and containment, emergency first aid for animals and humans, use of emergency equipment (e.g., fire extinguishers, first aid kits), and securing of facilities.
- **Recognition of Emergency Situations:** Instruction on identifying early warning signs of natural disasters, medical emergencies, facility hazards, or unusual animal behaviour indicative of stress or danger.
- **Communication Protocols:** Guidance on effective communication during emergencies, including the use of radios, emergency contact trees, and protocols for alerting external emergency services.
- To maintain a high level of preparedness, biannual emergency drills and simulations must be organised and executed. These exercises serve multiple purposes:
- **Effectiveness Testing:** Drills test the practical application, clarity, and adequacy of emergency response plans in simulated real-world scenarios.
- **Gap Analysis:** They help identify procedural weaknesses, resource deficiencies, communication breakdowns, and any areas requiring procedural adjustments or additional training.
- **Reinforcement of Preparedness Culture:** Regular drills foster an organisational culture that values safety, readiness, and proactive risk management.
- **Coordination Practice:** Drills facilitate seamless coordination between internal teams—such as animal care staff, facility management, and administration—and external responders like fire brigades, emergency medical services, and veterinary emergency teams.
- Post-drill evaluations must be documented and reviewed by leadership to implement corrective actions and update emergency procedures accordingly. Staff feedback should be actively solicited to improve training relevance and effectiveness.
- By embedding rigorous training and regular drills within organisational practice, WAFA Members ensure their teams are confident, competent, and capable of responding

swiftly and effectively to emergencies, thereby protecting both animal and human welfare.

## **8. Veterinary Emergency Care**

WAFA Members must establish and maintain comprehensive protocols to ensure rapid and unimpeded access to qualified emergency veterinary care whenever needed. These protocols shall include prearranged agreements and contact details with local veterinary clinics, 24-hour emergency animal hospitals, and mobile veterinary services where available.

Transportation plans must be in place to facilitate the safe and swift movement of animals to veterinary facilities or for on-site emergency treatment. These plans should consider the species-specific needs of the animals and ensure minimal stress or injury during transport.

Clear and reliable communication channels must be maintained between animal handlers, staff, and veterinary providers throughout any emergency to coordinate timely assessment and treatment.

Members must ensure that all relevant medical records, vaccination histories, and care notes are kept current and accessible to support efficient and effective emergency care.

Importantly, the person in control or custody of the animal at any given time—whether a handler, trainer, foster carer, or staff member—must have the immediate and unconditional authority to seek emergency veterinary care without delay. This authority includes acting without waiting for approvals or authorisations from third parties when urgent care is required to stabilise the animal's condition.

Once the animal is stabilised, the responsible party (such as the legal owner or program operator) must be contacted promptly to discuss and approve any further treatment or ongoing care costs. The legal owner remains fully responsible for all costs incurred to stabilise the animal in an emergency, regardless of subsequent approvals.

Any unnecessary delay in providing emergency care due to awaiting consent is strictly prohibited, as it may compromise the animal's welfare and safety.

All staff, volunteers, and handlers must be adequately trained and kept up-to-date in animal first aid, including recognising signs of distress or injury that require veterinary attention. This ensures timely identification of emergencies and appropriate responses to protect animal welfare.

## **9. Communication**

Effective and reliable communication is essential to ensure a coordinated and timely response during emergencies affecting working animals, handlers, staff, and facilities. WAFA members must establish and maintain communication systems and protocols that enable prompt notification, information sharing, and coordination among all relevant stakeholders.

These stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- Handlers, trainers, and all personnel directly involved in animal care and management.

- Facility managers, designated emergency coordinators, and onsite leadership.
- Veterinary professionals and emergency services, including animal ambulance or rescue teams.
- Clients, family members, guardians, or other authorised representatives when applicable.

Communication protocols must include multiple methods of contact, such as telephone calls, text messaging, email, and secure messaging apps, to ensure redundancy and reliability. Backup communication plans are required to address potential failures or outages of primary communication channels.

Additionally, all personnel should be trained on these communication procedures, including how and when to escalate information during emergencies. Clear lines of responsibility must be defined to avoid confusion and delays.

Regular testing and review of communication systems should be conducted to ensure effectiveness and to incorporate lessons learned from drills or actual incidents.

## 10. Continuity of Care

WAFA members must ensure that essential care for working animals is maintained without interruption during and following any emergency event. Emergency plans should clearly outline provisions to uphold animal welfare and handler support throughout crisis situations and recovery phases.

Key components include:

- **Temporary Housing:** Arrangements must be in place to provide safe, secure, and species-appropriate temporary accommodations if primary facilities become inaccessible or compromised. These accommodations should meet all welfare standards regarding space, comfort, sanitation, and enrichment.
- **Sustained Access to Resources:** Animals must have continuous access to adequate food, clean water, and any necessary medical treatments, including ongoing medication administration or emergency interventions.
- **Animal First Aid:** An animal first aid kit must be readily available at all times to the person in charge of the animal. This individual must be properly trained to competently use the kit and provide immediate first aid care as needed until veterinary assistance can be obtained.
- **Psychological Support:** Handlers, staff, and animals impacted by the emergency may experience trauma or stress. Plans should include access to psychological first aid, counselling, or peer support services to promote wellbeing and resilience.
- **Clear Handover Procedures:** When staffing or caregiving responsibilities change during emergencies, formalised handover protocols must ensure continuity and clarity in care

delivery. Documentation should accompany these transitions to maintain consistency in animal management.

- **Post-Incident Recovery and Review:** Following an emergency, welfare monitoring must continue to detect and address any delayed or ongoing health or behavioural impacts on animals. Additionally, a comprehensive review of the emergency response should be conducted to assess effectiveness, identify lessons learned, and update plans accordingly.

## **11. Risk Assessment and Mitigation**

All WAFA Members must proactively identify, assess, and manage risks relevant to their operations through a structured, documented risk assessment process. This process must be reviewed:

- At least annually,
- Whenever there are major changes in operations, facilities, or service regions,
- Following any significant incident or emergency.

Risk assessments must address both animal- and human-related risks and include, but are not limited to:

- Natural disasters specific to the local area (e.g., bushfire-prone zones, flooding risk, cyclonic conditions).
- Facility-related risks such as power outages, HVAC failure, chemical storage hazards, and kennel or enclosure breaches.
- Health-related risks such as zoonotic disease outbreaks, heatstroke, or cold exposure.
- Human-caused emergencies, including intruders, aggression, or vehicular accidents during transport.
- Risks associated with community-based service delivery (e.g., outreach work, travel in rural or remote areas, temporary venues).
- Mitigation strategies must be implemented based on the assessed likelihood and consequence of each risk. These may include:
  - Installation and regular testing of smoke alarms, sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers, and backup generators.
  - Clear plans for animal transport and relocation during environmental emergencies.
  - Routine maintenance of animal housing to ensure structural integrity and environmental safety.
  - Backup communication methods and contact trees in case of telecommunications failure.
  - Heat mitigation strategies including shade, cooling systems, and hydration protocols.

## **12. Documentation and Records**

Effective emergency management requires thorough, accessible, and secure recordkeeping. All WAFA Members must:

- Maintain written emergency preparedness and response plans, updated at least annually or after major incidents.
- Keep training logs, including attendance records, dates, topics covered, and trainer credentials.
- Document all emergency drills and simulations, noting outcomes, observations, and identified gaps.
- Record any real-life emergency events, including timelines, actions taken, outcomes, and post-incident reviews.
- File all veterinary emergency care records, communications, and cost approvals separately and securely.

Records must be:

- Retained for a minimum of five (5) years.
- Protected against loss, unauthorised access, or environmental damage.
- Made available to WAFA for compliance checks, investigations, or auditing purposes upon request.
- Stored in a format that allows rapid access in emergencies (digital or physical), including off-site backups where appropriate.

### **13. Infection Control and Biohazard Response**

Members must maintain clearly defined and practiced procedures for preventing, identifying, and responding to infectious diseases or biological hazards. This includes:

- A written infection control plan specific to the species, population density, and activities of the program.
- Isolation or quarantine procedures for animals exposed to illness, including designated spaces away from shared environments.
- Step-by-step response plans for managing zoonotic diseases, such as ringworm, parvovirus, leptospirosis, kennel cough, or emerging diseases like COVID-19.
- Access to and use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, masks, gowns, and boot covers when handling exposed or ill animals.
- Clear signage for infection zones, staff instructions, and cleaning protocols.
- Use of veterinary-approved disinfectants and evidence-based cleaning regimes after exposure.
- Communication procedures to inform staff, volunteers, handlers, and relevant external partners of any outbreak or risk.

Staff and volunteers must be trained to identify symptoms of contagious disease and follow all protocols diligently. WAFA Members are encouraged to consult with their veterinary advisors when developing or updating infection control plans.

## **14. Legal Responsibility and Insurance**

To prevent delay or confusion in emergencies, WAFA Members must ensure all working animals have:

- Clear documentation of legal ownership, custody, and responsibilities (e.g., program-owned, fostered, co-owned with handler).
- An up-to-date file outlining medical history, insurance status, microchip records, and emergency contacts.

During emergencies:

- The legal owner or program retains financial responsibility for all costs incurred in stabilising the animal, regardless of who is present at the time.
- Once the animal is stabilised, any further treatment or elective care may be deferred pending contact with the owner or program and approval for ongoing costs.
- Emergency responders and those in control of the animal (e.g., trainer, foster carer, handler) must act in the animal's best welfare interest, including authorising emergency vet care without delay.
- No protocol or organisational policy shall delay access to life-saving treatment.

## **15. Public and Media Engagement**

In the event of an emergency or high-profile incident involving working animals, WAFA Members must handle public and media communications responsibly. This includes:

- Nominating a single trained spokesperson (e.g., Director, Communications Officer) to coordinate all external statements.
- Preparing and using approved key messages to communicate essential facts without breaching privacy or causing distress.
- Ensuring all communications are trauma-informed, accurate, and respectful of those affected (including clients, staff, volunteers, and animals).
- Avoiding the release of images or details of animals or handlers unless consent has been obtained and risks assessed.
- Using discretion on social media platforms—no live posts or emotional content during critical response periods unless necessary.
- Releasing formal updates post-incident once the welfare of all parties is confirmed, and internal reviews have been completed.

All public statements should reinforce WAFA's commitment to safety, animal welfare, and responsible service delivery.

## **16. References**

- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)*
- Animal Welfare Acts (relevant state and territory legislation)
- Australian Emergency Management Standards (AS 3745-2010)

- Relevant local government emergency management plans

## **17. Review, Revision and Approvals**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the steering committee to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Any revisions will require approval from the steering committee.

## **18. Implementation**

WAFA members must integrate these standards into governance frameworks, operational policies, financial management, human resources, and client service delivery to maintain high standards of accountability and organisational integrity.

## **19. Enforcement**

WAFA enforces these standards through its accreditation and audit processes. Non-compliance will lead to remedial actions and may impact ongoing WAFA membership and certification status.

## **20. Contact Information**

For further information or assistance related to this standard, please contact the steering committee at the following email address: [admin@workinganimals.com.au](mailto:admin@workinganimals.com.au)

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### **Document Control**

| Version | Date       | Author     | Change Description | Approved By |
|---------|------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|
| V1.0    | 17/05/2025 | V. Solomon | Initial            | C.Williams  |