

# Emergency Pet Sheltering and the Medical Reserve Corps

In response to the discussion, and request by some MRC leaders, Liisa Jackson and I (with some editing and pitch education provided by Nancy Burns!) developed the following regarding Emergency Pet Sheltering and how local MRCs can be an excellent resource for our emergency response partners. The material provides background about the need to accommodate pets in emergencies/disasters, resources (via footnotes), as well as a how-to approach to delivering a brief pitch discussing the role of MRCs in emergency pet sheltering to those we collaborate with.

The italicized *30-second elevator pitch* can help MRC leaders briefly offer the highlights to those who have no background and could benefit from this knowledge.

If you have any questions, please let us know, we are here to help!

*Lisa*

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## I. Background & Resources

One of the core functions of the MA Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is to support our local First Responders and Emergency Preparedness Partners. During an emergency or disaster where the sheltering of community members is essential, MRC Volunteers are trained and prepared to assist. We know that in emergency situations, caring for community members' pets may not be our partners' top priority. But it is important for them to know that that 94 million households across the country (around 70%) have at least one pet<sup>1</sup>. And, both Federal<sup>2</sup> and MA<sup>3</sup> law ensure that household pets also receive proper care during an emergency/disaster. The MRC can help support our response partners in caring for both humans and their pets during these events.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Wide Mass Care and Shelter Coordination Plan (November 2024)<sup>4</sup> and Local Shelter Toolkit (July 2018)<sup>5</sup> discuss provisions for emergency household pet sheltering in a number of sections. Many local emergency management agencies have adopted these guidelines to address sheltering in their communities. To support the efforts of local Emergency Preparedness and Response partners, some communities have added MRC volunteers to their sheltering plans.

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<sup>1</sup> American Pet Products Association 2025 report:

[https://americanpetproducts.org/news/the-american-pet-products-association-appa-releases-2025-dog-cat-report?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=21647475106&gbraid=0AAAAAQuNtHxwPAT5c2tUXRFPmBzjgdLii](https://americanpetproducts.org/news/the-american-pet-products-association-appa-releases-2025-dog-cat-report?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21647475106&gbraid=0AAAAAQuNtHxwPAT5c2tUXRFPmBzjgdLii)

<sup>2</sup> Pets Evacuation & Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act of 2006): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/3858>

<sup>3</sup> *Ensuring the Safety of People with Pets in Disasters*, Massachusetts Executive Order Acts of 2-14, Chapter 54:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter54>

<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth of Massachusetts Statewide Mass Care and Shelter Coordination Plan:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/mass-care-and-shelter-coordination-plan>

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth of Massachusetts Statewide Mass Care and Shelter Coordination Plan Local Shelter Toolkit:

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-statewide-mass-care-and-shelter-coordination-plan-local-shelter-toolkit/download>

Working with the State of Massachusetts Animal Resource Team (SMART), we have developed trainings that meet national best practices for supporting pets in emergency/disaster situations that may include sheltering both community members and their household pets. Many of our MRC Volunteers are also part of local Disaster Animal Response Teams (DART). In addition to being trained to support community members in local/regional emergency disaster shelters, the MRC-DART Volunteers have also been trained to assist and support local Emergency Management and local Animal Control Officers in providing expertise in sheltering and caring for animals affected by disasters.

By integrating MRC-DART volunteers into local/regional disaster plans, shelters can be staffed efficiently and operate effectively during crises. The intent is to protect both public safety and animal welfare at *no additional cost* to the local/regional community(s).

## II. Delivering an Effective 30-Second Elevator Pitch

The purpose of a 30-second elevator pitch is to give another person a BRIEF, memorable summary of a topic.

The pitch should be engaging, *without being memorized*. A good pitch is shared with enthusiasm, ***in your own words***. Limit the content to no more than three key points. SHORT IS BEST.

To practice *your* version of the pitch, imagine walking into an elevator on the ground floor of a tall building, when someone else steps in and the door closes. The person smiles and invites you to answer this statement: “I understand you know something about pets in disaster; what’s that about?”

*You have 30 seconds to reply* before the elevator door opens at the top floor and the person leaves – with you having piqued their interest and wanting to learn more. Here’s a template for practicing your own pitch.

### Template Pitch:

*Glad you asked! Not everyone knows this, but **the law requires** emergency shelters to accommodate not only people, but also their pets. **and service animals.***

*MRC volunteers are already working with animal response teams to **teach pet sheltering concepts to the public.***  
*MRC volunteers and animal response teams are already training together to support disaster response partners and the public*

*Members of MRCs and animal response teams are being written into local disaster plans. The goal is to shelter people and their animals **at no additional cost to the community!** Isn’t that great?*