

# Flooding takes a toll on pets, shelters

## No-kill facilities form Midwest rescue plan

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Lesley Irwin scrolls through 200 pitiable e-mails a day to pick out the lucky dogs and cats she can keep in her Huntley pet shelter, then anguishes over the many she has to turn away.

"Every day I'm trying to balance out the good with the bad," Irwin said Monday.

Her Animal House Shelter is one of roughly 50 no-kill shelters in Illinois that are taking in scores of pets from Midwest flood zones. In most cases, their owners lost homes in the high water and can no longer afford to care for their animals, dropping them off at already overcrowded shelters that euthanize.

The demand for new homes for these four-footed refugees has mobilized a network of dozens of volunteers, who are transporting them in relays to no-kill shelters, most of them in the Chicago area.

"So many are getting euthanized that don't make it out," said Sally Matay, president of Illinois Animal Rescue, who said she is receiving up to 1,000 e-mails a day from people seeking shelters for the pets.

For weeks now, there has been growing pressure to

rescue animals from facilities that are either flooded or overcrowded because of water-logged communities nearby.

Matay, who started a rescue pipeline last year, is a middleman, connecting animals scheduled to be euthanized with no-kill shelters. Every Tuesday, volunteers pick up animals from pounds in southern Illinois, Iowa and Indiana—areas all hard hit by the recent floods—and transport them in cargo vans to Tinley Park and Joliet, where another van in the relay takes over.

"A lot of people had dogs tied up in their backyards, so when the yards flooded, they lost their homes," said Julie Falkenberg, vice president of the Perry County Humane Society. "Their owners either untie them when the yard floods or hand them over to the pound for lack of a better place to put them."

Sally Westerhoff, executive director of the Quincy Humane Society, sent an e-mail to Chicago-area animal shelters last week asking for help. Her shelter is filled to capacity as it cares for 20 animals that belong to flood victims and another 22 from the nearby shelter in Missouri's Pike County that was overwhelmed.

"There have been people who have come in [to give up their pets] and I've said, 'We're in the middle of a disaster here. There all these people who have lost their

homes and can't take care of their pets, so you're going to have to hold on to yours a little bit longer,'" she said.

Westerhoff said two of the dogs—a black Lab mix and an American Eskimo—were left chained in a backyard as a family drove away when their home was evacuated.

Many of the dogs, Irwin said, arrive infested with ticks, mange and heartworm.

Buster, a large yellow dog that looks like a cross between a Labrador and golden retriever, arrived Sunday at Irwin's shelter with red sores on the tips of his ears. Fly bites are common, she said.

"We are getting the ones no longer wanted by their owners, or there are no other options for their owners," said Cindy Ritter, general manager for the Huntley shelter. "It's really difficult because you want to rescue every one of them."

The shelter can house 150 to 200 dogs and about 50 to 75 cats. It currently has 70 dogs from flooded areas with about 60 more scheduled to arrive this week.

Publicity about the animals' plight brought a record 45 adoptions over the weekend, she said.

Officials at no-kill shelters hope that by rescuing dogs before they get sick, they can save the animals from being euthanized.

On Wednesday, volunteers from PAWS Chicago will



Tribune photo by Jim Prisching

Angie Mourakas plays with a dog at the Animal House Shelter in Huntley. It has taken in 70 dogs and expects 60 more.

head to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to pick up 9 to 12 dogs abandoned during the recent flooding, said Paula Fasseas, founder and chairwoman of the no-kill organization.

The animals had to wait out a mandatory window of time in case their owners came back to claim them. But

no one did, Fasseas said.

"The saddest part is that these people have left their homes and they're devastated," she said. "They'd like to see [the pets] get a good home."

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