All Hazards Disaster Planning for Captive Wildlife and Exotic Animal Facilities, with Emphasis on Rural Locations

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The goal of emergency and all hazards planning for captive wildlife and exotic animal facilities is to mitigate adverse outcomes for humans, animals and the community during emergencies and disasters. The process of creating an emergency plan allows a facility to identify vulnerabilities and resource gaps, while also establishing a resource network and processes for resource requests. One of the most important components of a plan is to establish staff roles and responsibilities during emergencies and disasters. Familiarity with the incident command system lends guidelines to establish effective emergency response.

Performing a comprehensive risk assessment for captive wildlife and exotic animal facilities is the starting point of contingency planning. The process drives internal dialogue, external resource development and emergency planning. A template document expedites data collection and risk analysis. Sections include perceived vulnerability scoring, geographic risks, structural facility risks, animal health risks, animal nutrition risks, animal management equipment, human health risks and shelter in place assessment.

Rural facilities face high vulnerabilities and limited resources. Intrinsically, rural locations lead to more challenging transportation logistics, both for movement onto and off of the facility. A beautiful backdrop also can carry higher natural disaster risk, such as wildfires, tsunamis and floods. Utility disruptions are more frequent. Without as many local conveniences, re-supplying food, water and animal equipment can be slower and skilled staffing can be harder to find. Despite these challenges, rural communities often have a strong community mindset and connecting with local stakeholders is integral to preparedness. Connecting facilities with appropriate resources improves the entire community’s emergency plans.

A template document for emergency planning can help drive discussion, facilitate change and strengthen preparedness. A template can improve efficiency and effectiveness, while still adapting to the individuality of each facility.