



AGGIES STEP UP

**Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team (VET)
Hurricane Harvey Response**

It Was History in the Making

Last year will go down as a seminal moment in the Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team's (VET) history. Hurricane Harvey caused tremendous destruction up and down the Texas Gulf Coast and tested the state of Texas's entire emergency response framework. Category IV hurricane wind speeds along the southern coast accompanied by historic flooding throughout the mid and upper coast impacted human and animal populations across a wide area of our state.

The VET, along with our partners and supporters, have been preparing for this exact moment since our team was formed just nine years ago, in 2009. We have worked tirelessly to make sure a robust, capable, and self-sufficient team was ready to go into communities impacted by disasters and ask, "What problem can we solve for you today?"



Our team and supporters have planned and practiced dealing with the variety of risks and hazards that are often encountered when disaster strikes. Our instructor and student teams have worked diligently with communities around the state to develop emergency plans focused on limiting animal suffering. Faculty, staff, students, and non-academic veterinary medical partners have honed their skills and learned how to apply them in challenging environments in the hopes of saving animal lives, limiting suffering, and helping families reunite with their animals so that healing and recovery can proceed a bit more quickly.

These efforts proved to be excellent investments as our team was called to respond in 10 jurisdictions located between Nueces County and the Texas-Louisiana border following Hurricane Harvey. The VET Hurricane Harvey response impacted more than 4,000 animals, including medical interventions, support provided to the emergency animal sheltering community, and animals that were positively impacted by community emergency plans authored by our faculty and students. Our response was described as the model for the nation by members of the federal and other state governments.

Partners in Response

The assistance we were able to provide to the victims of Harvey was made possible because of the tremendous support the team received from many people. Texas A&M University and The Texas A&M University System, as well as our College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (CVM), have supported the Texas A&M VET by allowing us to call on our faculty, staff, and students to serve as the team members who work tirelessly and represent the very best of what I believe is the greatest college/university system in the United States

There are so many words I could use to describe our team—dedicated, compassionate, highly intelligent, skilled, hard-working; they are the epitome of “selfless service” and

represent the values and ethics of Texas A&M so well. Our university partners from Texas A&M Engineering Extension’s Texas Task Force 1, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, and the Texas A&M Forest Service represent the same high standards and also carry the Texas A&M flag while also serving our state when disaster strikes.

The Texas Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps (TVMRC) members were instrumental in carrying out a highly successful response. The TVMRC is comprised of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and other professionals who elect to take time out of their professional and personal lives to train and respond with the VET, including numerous members who responded for the first time during Hurricane Harvey. They came to the VET and TVMRC through the Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) and Texas Equine Veterinary Association (TEVA). Many, but not all, are Aggies. They all represent our university and state exceptionally well. We would not have been as successful without them.

Planning for the Future

The Texas A&M VET and TVMRC are not resting on our laurels in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Our response equipment, pharmacy, and supply cache have all been rehabilitated and stand ready to respond the next time we are needed. We are upgrading one of our older medical platform trailers to make it more usable for our team members and easier to sustain in a disaster environment.

The new truck-based veterinary medical platform provided to us by the Banfield Foundation has been fully equipped and stocked to offer our team a more efficient, mobile, and powerful unit that we can deploy at a moment’s notice. This new unit illustrates our pathway forward and is the model the VET will be pursuing as we are able to upgrade our fleet. Our goal is to be able to respond to impacted communities even faster than we currently do, a worthy goal when minutes matter.



HURRICANE HARVEY: THE TAMU-VET RESPONSE

★ TAMU-VET Response Locations

■ Northern Base of Operations

■ Central Base of Operations

■ Southern Base of Operations

BoO = Base of Operations

IST = Incident Support Team

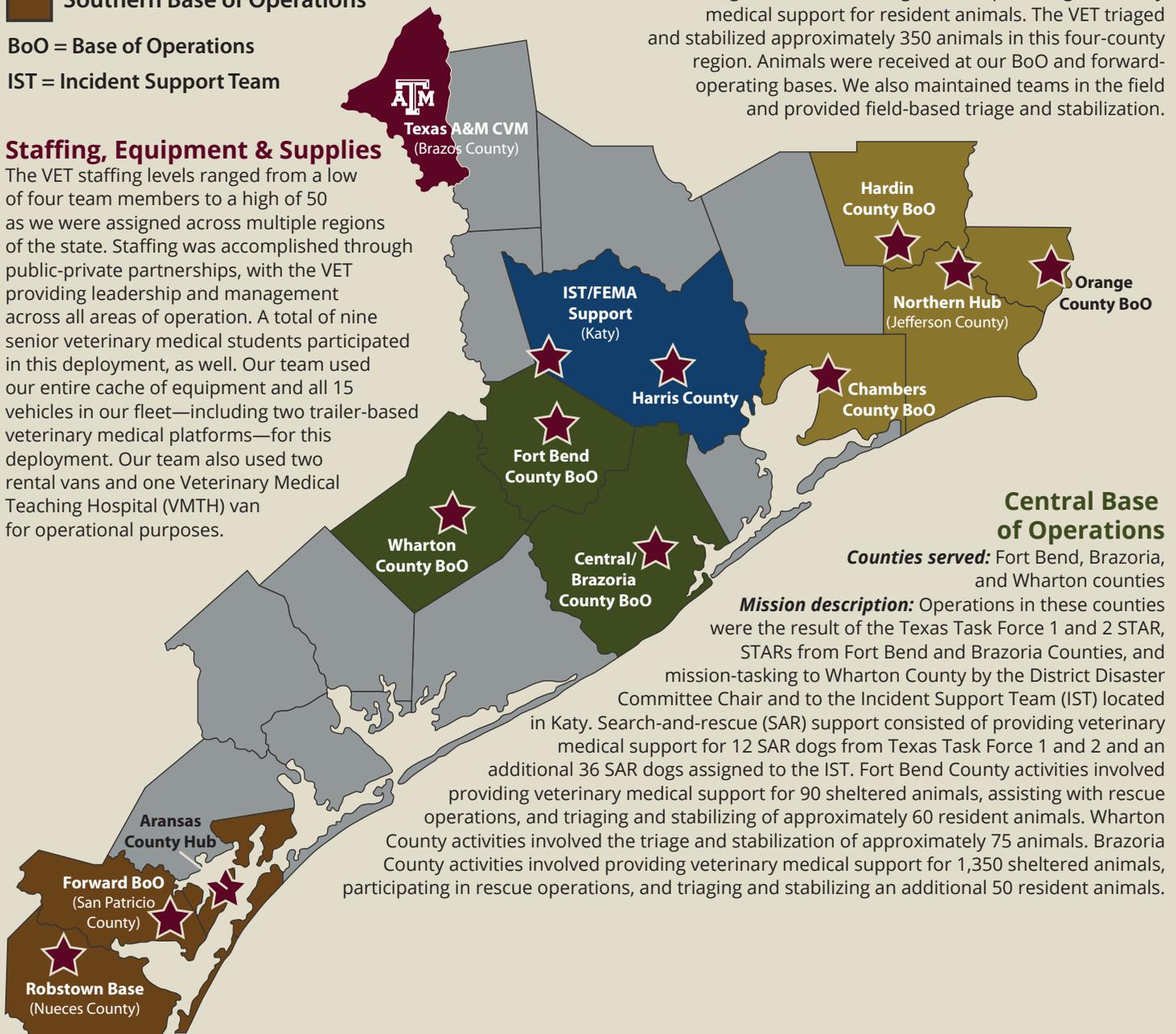
Staffing, Equipment & Supplies

The VET staffing levels ranged from a low of four team members to a high of 50 as we were assigned across multiple regions of the state. Staffing was accomplished through public-private partnerships, with the VET providing leadership and management across all areas of operation. A total of nine senior veterinary medical students participated in this deployment, as well. Our team used our entire cache of equipment and all 15 vehicles in our fleet—including two trailer-based veterinary medical platforms—for this deployment. Our team also used two rental vans and one Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital (VMTH) van for operational purposes.

Northern Base of Operations

Counties served: Chambers, Jefferson, Hardin, and Orange counties

Mission description: Operations in the northern hub were the result of individual State of Texas Assistance Requests (STAR) from each county. The VET maintained a Base of Operations (BoO) at the Ford Center in Beaumont and forward operating bases in Hardin and Chambers counties. The assigned mission-tasking involved providing veterinary medical support for resident animals. The VET triaged and stabilized approximately 350 animals in this four-county region. Animals were received at our BoO and forward-operating bases. We also maintained teams in the field and provided field-based triage and stabilization.



Central Base of Operations

Counties served: Fort Bend, Brazoria, and Wharton counties

Mission description: Operations in these counties were the result of the Texas Task Force 1 and 2 STAR, STARs from Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties, and mission-tasking to Wharton County by the District Disaster Committee Chair and to the Incident Support Team (IST) located in Katy. Search-and-rescue (SAR) support consisted of providing veterinary medical support for 12 SAR dogs from Texas Task Force 1 and 2 and an additional 36 SAR dogs assigned to the IST. Fort Bend County activities involved providing veterinary medical support for 90 sheltered animals, assisting with rescue operations, and triaging and stabilizing of approximately 60 resident animals. Wharton County activities involved the triage and stabilization of approximately 75 animals. Brazoria County activities involved providing veterinary medical support for 1,350 sheltered animals, participating in rescue operations, and triaging and stabilizing an additional 50 resident animals.

Southern Base of Operations

Counties served: Nueces, San Patricio, and Aransas counties

Mission description: The initial STAR was in support of Texas Task Force 1 and 2. Our team provided veterinary medical support for 12 SAR dogs and for approximately 75 resident animals. This support included four CVM veterinary medical faculty and staff. An initial STAR was received from Aransas County three days after the team had repositioned to Fort Bend County. Two CVM faculty and staff, one TVMRC member, and multiple TVMA members provided veterinary medical oversight of approximately 125 sheltered household pets and triaged and stabilized an additional 75 animals, with operations coming to an end on Monday, Sept. 11.



Preparing Students & Communities

The Texas A&M VET is also continuing our work in the discipline of emergency preparedness. Our instructors and students routinely work with communities around the state to develop effective emergency plans focused on eliminating animal suffering, while also educating our students. Our schedule for the year is full, and we are focusing on those communities so recently hit.

We are continuing to develop and advance cutting-edge educational modalities focused on developing the next generation of veterinary medical and emergency management leaders. Our veterinary medical students are a truly amazing group of young people; they are dedicated, highly intelligent, and hard-working. They also have a

tremendous awareness of the importance of public and community service and represent the future of veterinary medicine. I, for one, am excited about what the future holds.

The VET is also working to spread veterinary medical participation in emergency preparedness and response. We have many academic partners with which we have been excited about collaborating on some of our most recent activities, including our team's annual emergency response exercise, which we developed and executed in April, as well as the relationships we fostered by supporting an exercise at Oklahoma State University in March.

The Value of Your Support

The VET was able to support the many people who responded with us through continual planning, exercise, and the use of an equipment and supply cache developed specifically for a large-scale disaster response. The Texas A&M Foundation, development staff, and our numerous financial supporters made—and continue to make—this all possible. It literally would not have been possible without you.

We strive to make your investments—whether through time, money, or effort—something you can be proud of. You have made our team sustainable, the largest and most sophisticated veterinary emergency team in the country, and the model for the nation. There are no words that can express the gratitude we feel for what you do for us, the animals, and the people who have been and will be impacted by disasters. Please know that we take your support of and belief in us very seriously and work every day to uphold your trust and friendship.

The Texas A&M VET sincerely hopes that you view your investments in our team as worthy and honorable. You have had such a tremendous impact on our team members and students; on the communities in which we have planned and responded; and, most importantly, on the lives of the animals and people who have had some of the worst days of their lives.

—Wesley T. Bissett, DVM, PhD
Director, Texas A&M VET

For more information about how you can support the mission of the Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team, please contact:

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Office of Development & Alumni Relations
 Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences
 4461 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843-4661

Email: development@cvm.tamu.edu
 Web: give.am/VET | Tel: 979.845.9043



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
**Veterinary
 Emergency Team**

Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team
 4475 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843-4475

Email: wbissett@cvm.tamu.edu | Web: vetmed.tamu.edu/vet
 Tel: 979.845.3541 | Facebook: @TAMUVET | Twitter: @TAMUVET1