

Service Animal Guidance – for Emergency Shelter Managers and Workers

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensures that people with disabilities have access to all available services, including those in emergency services. Mass care shelters must permit service animals, either dogs or miniature horses, to stay with their handlers in the shelter.

Types of service animals and the tasks they are trained to do complete very greatly. The following is a list of examples, not exhaustive, of disabilities service animals may assist with:

- Visual and/or hearing impairment
- Mobility impairment
- Medical conditions such as severe allergies, diabetes, seizures, epilepsy
- Psychiatric disabilities/PTSD service dogs

More information on service animals may be found at:

<https://usserviceanimals.org/blog/types-of-service-animals/>

The Shelter Manager is encouraged to work with their county's County Animal Response Team (CART) for support regarding service animals and their handlers in the human shelters, such as for pet food/feeding support and supplies, veterinary care, and where to locate and configure the Animal Walk Area (aka defecation/urination and exercise areas).

Service animal handlers are encouraged to bring their service animal's supplies with them. However, additional supplies and equipment may need to be acquired by shelter managers to accommodate service animals.

Service Animal supply/equipment checklist:

- Dog crate/kennel/cage- Size 36-inch or 42-inch recommended
- Pet mat/bed
- Disposable bowls for food and water
- Poop baggies
- Poop scoopers
- Poop/pee pads
- Plastic sheeting material
- Pet food (It is best to confer with the owner as to the type/brand of pet food they typically use, and obtain the same, as to avoid digestive upsets to the service animal.)
- Refrigerator or cooler with ice for pet food or animal's medication, if required

Needs in the shelter:

- Provide training for Staff awareness on communication with people with disabilities
- Check that the shelter is safe for service animals (and/or other medical devices), such as from chemicals (i.e. cleaning, sanitizing, disinfectant products not properly applied and dried on surfaces where the animal might walk on or touch), toxins (i.e. certain plants, chocolate, etc.), and hazards. In addition, areas should be inspected for chemicals that may have leaked out of vehicles such as antifreeze which is deadly to dogs. During inclement weather such as snow or

sleed dogs can get foot injuries from salt and other chemicals used for snow, in their feet and paws. There is an option for non-toxic snow melting salt which is not harmful to dogs' paws.

- Service animals should be within the handlers control at all times.

Extra supplies:

- Acquire the additional supplies/equipment needed.
 - If not on hand, then develop resource requests and submit to your County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) before a shelter is needed.

Examples of extra materials:

- Tactile floor tape/indicators
- Signage (in Braille and other languages), if possible/feasible
- Disposable bowls for food and water for the service animal
- Poop baggies
- Poop scoopers
- Pet mat for the service animal to sleep on
- Dog crate/kennel/cage
- Pet food (It is best to confer with the handler as to the type/brand of pet food they typically use, and obtain the same, as to avoid digestive upsets to the service animal.)
- Poop/pee pads

Registration:

- The service animal handler should provide an emergency contact of a person who will take care of the service animal if the handler gets sick and has to be transported to the hospital.
 - If the animal was trained by an agency which retains ownership of the animal, the following information should be provided:
 - Agency name, address, phone number and a person of contact at that agency
 - This agency may have an affiliated member that could house and care for the animal, temporarily, if the service animal had to be separated from its handler.
- The shelter staff should describe where the Animal Walk/Relief Area is located, the configuration of it, and how to access the area.
- If applicable or requested, shelter staff may assist or complete outdoor walks with the service animal instead of the handler. Especially in inclement weather where it may be difficult or dangerous for the handler.
- The shelter staff should describe where their service animal's food/water will be located and how to access it.
- The shelter staff should ask if the person would require any assistance.
- The shelter staff should describe where the Animal Walk/Relief Area is located, the configuration of it, and how to access the area.
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 - The shelter staff should ask if the person would require any assistance.

Animal Walk/Relief Area (poop/pee and exercise area):

- Should be easily accessible to the handler's specific needs with the service animal

- Have a grassy area alongside a smooth paved/concrete walkway, sidewalk or area, free from obstructions, to enable the handler to traverse the area alongside their Service Animal.
- If disaster conditions prohibit going outside, designate an area away from others and provide poop/pee pads with plastic sheeting material underneath.
- It may be helpful to have a shelter staff member posted at this area to describe the layout and location of this area and the items in this area, to the service animal handler.
- Should be marked out
- A tactile component for the marking should be considered, such as tactile tape and physical markers
- Post signage (braille, other languages) to designate the Animal Walk Area.
- Have lined garbage can(s) available to deposit poop bags and other trash.
- Have a hands-free hand wash station and/or portable automatic hand sanitizer station available.

Veterinary care:

- If a service animal gets sick while in the shelter:
 - The Shelter Manager should collaborate with the handler to contact a veterinarian, preferably the service animal's veterinarian, to determine the course of action to take. In cases where the handler's veterinarian is unavailable, the shelter should have a list of local emergency and nonemergency veterinary facilities.

If the handler of the service animal gets sick while in the shelter:

- Depending on the severity of the handler's sickness:
 - If the handler is moved to the isolation area, the service animal should remain with the handler as long as the handler is able to take care of their service animal.
 - If the handler and service animal needs to be separated from the rest of the shelter clients for whatever reason, by law, communication access must be provided.
 - A separate Animal Walk/Relief Area should be set up for use.
 - If the handler needs to be transported to the hospital:
 - Hospitals must allow the service animal to remain with the individual whenever possible.
 - If it is not possible, due to whatever circumstances, the handler must first be allowed to make arrangements for someone else to care for the animal.
 - If that is not possible, due to the person's health condition (too sick or incapacitated), the handler's emergency contact and/or service animal's agency should be contacted to pick up the service animal from the human shelter.
 - If the emergency contact is not able to be contacted, the shelter manager or hospital can arrange board at a nearby facility until the person is well enough to make other arrangements.
 - The individual is responsible for the cost of boarding the service animal.

Feeding:

- The service animal's food, and other feeding supplies, if brought by the handler should be labeled with the handler's name. Access to water for the service animal should be supplied by the shelter.

- The food and feeding supplies should be kept in an area that is easily accessible by the service animal handler.
- If pet food is obtained by the human shelter, it is important to obtain the same pet food as the service animal is used to if possible. Many service animals may be on specific diets/brands.
- Canned pet food remaining after opening and use, should be kept covered and refrigerated, and used up before the “use within date after opening.”
- Handler supplied food should be labeled with the handler’s name.
- Have hand-free portable hand washing station(s) and/or portable automatic hand sanitizer station(s) in this area, along with garbage cans and liners.
- A shelter staff member should monitor this area and clean up any spills and sanitize this area after use.
- Feeding is under the control of the service animal handler only.
- Shelter staff may inquire about any physical or sight assistance that may be needed for feeding.

Sleeping:

- The service animal should be allowed to stay with their handler at all times. Typically, the service animal sleeps on the floor near its handler.
 - If the handler did not bring the service animal’s crate and/or bed, and if available, provide a dog crate/kennel, sleep mat or other bedding material (blanket, towel, etc.), for the service animal to sleep in/on.
- A private space separate from the other shelter clients should be designated for medical alert dogs and handlers, if needed. In cases where a service dog is trained for PTSD it may be important to provide a separate area for the handler and the dog. A dog that is trained for people who are deaf may also do better to alert their handler if they are in a quiet area.

References:

CDC Guidance for Handlers of Service and Therapy Animals

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/animals/service-therapy-animals.html>

CDC’s Recommendations for Disaster Sheltering of Household Pets, Service Animals, and Support Animals during the COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/mass-animal-care.html>

Key Facts About Service Animals for Disaster Shelter Workers

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/production-northeastada-org/local/en/NEADA+Fact+Sheet+-+Service+Animals+for+Disaster+Shelter+Workers.pdf>

This is a resource for service animal handlers before an emergency/disaster arises

<https://adata.org/service-animal-resource-hub/emergencies>

COVID-19 considerations for Service Animals in human shelters

NJ OEM Document Library