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Ongoing New Jersey Wildfires Demonstrate Need for Emergency Planning and County Animal Response Teams

The Humane Society of Berks County, Berks County's leader in animal welfare, issued a statement today reminding pet owners of the importance of preparing for disasters and supporting emergency programs like the Berks County Animal Response Team (Berks CART). "Once a disaster or catastrophe strikes, it's too late to make proper preparations," said Karel Minor, HSBC executive director. "The New Jersey wildfires once again bring us heart-breaking images of evacuees who must choose between their own safety and the safety of their pets. No one should have to abandon a pet to enter the safety of an emergency shelter. The HSBC urges all pet owners to plan now for possible disasters and to actively support the Berks CART—*before* a catastrophe strikes."

Berks CART is a public/private partnership that helps to prepare for disaster response and assist first responders by aiding pets in an emergency. By providing care and shelter for the pets of evacuees and others in need, first responders can better aid the pet owners. Berks CART was created in 2005 and the Humane Society of Berks County was named by the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team, the parent organization, as the lead agency. Berks CART utilizes service, product and charitable donations, as well as over 100 volunteer individuals and agencies, to provide these services.

The need for Animal Response Teams has been shown time and again as natural and man-made disasters have caused people to refuse to evacuate from danger or be able to take advantage of emergency services without abandoning their pets. Since its formation in 2005, Berks CART has been activated twice, most recently in the wake of the severe flooding in 2006 in which evacuees in Reading were forced to flee their homes. Berks CART provided emergency shelter for dozens of animals and allowed their owners to move to safety.

"It is the responsibility of State, County and local governments, as well as pet owners, to recognize the potential problem and do something about it," said Minor. "It is also our

responsibility as an animal welfare agency to help them. New Jersey's lack of preparation for handling evacuees with pets cannot happen here.”

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania's animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society provides adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading.

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