

**“Trueno” Preparedness Campaign for Pet Owners in Costa Rica 2012-
2014**

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Introduction

This paper describes a campaign developed by World Animal Protection designed to increase the level of preparedness of pet owners in Costa Rica. The campaign was implemented in 2012-2014 following a quantitative research study that determined the gaps in the level of preparedness according to the specific needs of companion animals in times of disasters. The campaign was then designed to fill the gaps of the assessment results and communication channels were selected based on media consumption by the specific target audience.

The first section establishes the strong attachment between people and their companion animals and describes the effects disasters have on pets and their owners. The document then describes the specific details of the campaign, starting with a pre-assessment of the preparedness levels of pet owners in the great metropolitan area of Costa Rica. The paper then describes the specific communication tactics used as part of this campaign, to then conclude with the results of the campaign that go beyond ratings and reaching the target audience and touch on changes in the behaviour.

The need to include pets in disaster response plans and communications has been established by several publications and empirical research, either because it is seen as threat to public safety (Heath et al., 2001, cited by Day, 2017) or due the strong human-animal bond (Gerwolls and Labott, 1994, quoted in Awadi, 2008). Although the level of risk a person is willing to take may vary based on their stronger attachment to their animal (Trigg et al., 2016), it has been established that pet ownership can influence people's decisions during all phases of a disaster, including the individual's willingness to work (Day, 2017). For example, it is well known that the excessive number of abandoned pets in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina led to the development of a Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act of 2006 in the United States (Edmonds and Cutter, 2008).

The essential role that companion animals play in the lives of their owners, as well as the need to find fresh and positive ways to promote disaster risk reduction among communities, made this campaign an innovative approach in Costa Rica to an issue that in the past had been addressed mainly from a negative perspective. As this document describes, positive results can be reached by messaging people about protecting their pets from disasters instead of focusing on the harmful impact these events could have on them. A similar thesis was shared by Trigg et al (2015) based on their analysis of pet owners in South Australia, as they stated that understanding the link between people and their companion animals could assist "emergency communicators in constructing motivating risk and preparedness messages for pet owners with the goal of improving community bushfire safety and pet welfare".



Photo 1 Girl sits with her pet after a flood in Argentina, 2016. World Animal Protection

Importance of companion animals

Companion animals are significant to people. Even those who do not own a pet will most likely interact with them in their communities and social networks. Attachment to pets offers a sense of security, attention, and comfort. Furthermore, the socioemotional support provided by pets facilitates coping with stressful situations and helps recovery (Walsh, 2009).

Pets are considered part of the family by many people, who would go to a significant degree of effort to ensure their well-being. Losing a pet can be a significant stressor and have negative consequences in people's lives, their relationships, and even performance at work. Some studies have even found that levels of grief after losing a companion animal can be compared to the levels of grief we experience after human loss (Gerwolls and Labott, 1994, quoted in Awadi, 2008).

The importance of companion animals to people can also be evidenced by the increase in the number of households owning one. In Australia, for example, pet ownership is as high as 63% (ACAC, 2006, quoted in Thompson, 2014), and in Costa Rica it's over 50% (World Animal Protection, 2016). According to the 2017-2018 APPA National Pet Owners Survey (2018), 68% of United States households own a pet, a 10% increase in 10 years. This survey also reports there is a total of 94.2 cats and 89.7 dogs in the US. More simply said, in the United States,

more children live with pets that with both of their parents (Walsh, 2009) which makes having a companion animal more common than even the “traditional” vision of two-parent family.

If we consider that pets are more commonly found in urban settings where 55% of the world’s population lives and that this proportion is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 according to the 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects Today; it would be a safe assumption that the number of owned cats and dogs will also increase in the next few years.

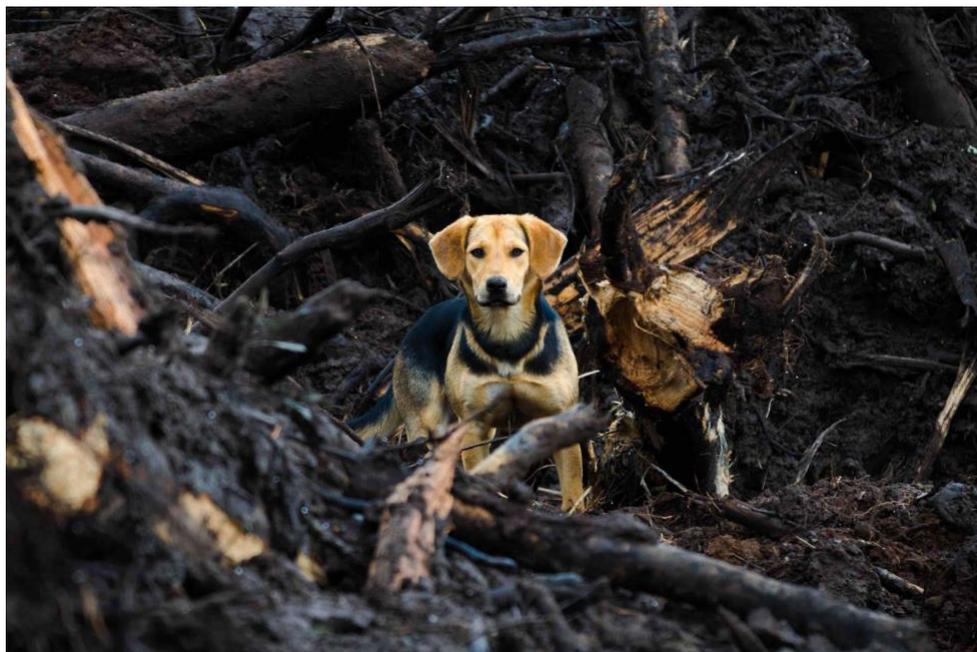


Photo 2 Dog rescued after a volcanic eruption in Chile, 2015. World Animal Protection

Pets and disasters

Similar to people, animals are gravely affected by disasters. Although exact figures of the impact of disasters on animals are limited, we estimate millions are injured every year. For example, during Hurricane Floyd in 1999, floods caused approximately 2.9 million pets and livestock to be killed, and thousands more companion animals were permanently separated from their owners (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2004, cited in Spain, 2017).

Studies show that families value pets the most during times of disruptive transitions, adversity or crisis (Cain, 1985, quoted by Walsh, 2009). Therefore, not only do companion animals depend entirely on their owners for protection from events like floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, but their suffering directly impacts their owners and their ability to recover from the disaster.

Research studies have been conducted to determine exactly how the effects of disasters on companion animals impact their owners. An analysis of victims of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana showed that the status of their companion animals - whether they kept or lost them - was strongly related to their mental health. "Pet loss was found to be associated with significantly higher levels of psychopathology, including acute stress and peritraumatic dissociation, as well as symptoms of depression and PTSD" (Awadi et al, 2008).

A second study, that assessed the association between psychosocial functioning and pet loss among primarily low-income African American single mothers who endured Hurricane Katrina, and, in some cases, Hurricane Rita; showed that pet loss was a significant predictor of post-hurricane psychological distress (Lowe 2009).

The importance of considering the attachment of people and their pets within the disaster risk management context goes beyond the psychological effects of their loss on their owners and also touches on its effects for effective evacuation. When analysing the relationship between pet closeness and survival plans for bushfires in Australia, a study determined that pet safety is a planning priority for people and that it influences the likelihood of having a survival plan (Trigg et al, 2015). Other studies have indicated that animal owners may put themselves in danger or hesitate to evacuate unless they feel their animals are secure (Lockwood, 1997 quoted by Hall et al, 2004).

For example, an assessment conducted in mandatory evacuation zones for Hurricane Irene in 2011, showed that while owning a pet was not a statistically significant risk factor for evacuation failure, 51% of the people who failed to evacuate did mention pet-related factors as important aspects of their decision not to evacuate (Hunt, 2012). Similar results were observed when interviewing residents of Yuba County in California after they had been under evacuation notice in 1997. An increasing number of cats in dogs in the household was related to an increased risk of evacuation failure (Heath et al, 2001).

Even in those cases where pet owners do evacuate, most of them would try to bring their pets with them. Studies as early as 2000 have shown the importance of pets in evacuation behaviour, indicating for example that houses with children were more likely to evacuate with their pet (Heath et al. 2000; 2001a,b, quoted by Edmonds and Cutter, 2008). A survey conducted with residents of the Louisiana coast evacuating due to Hurricane Gustav in 2008 showed that over 70% of the households that owned pets left with their animals (Thompson et al., 2012). During a chemical spill in Wisconsin, 40% of the people did not take their pets during the evacuation but tried to return prematurely because of concern for their safety (Heath et al., 2001, cited by Thompson, 2018).

World Animal Protection also attempted to understand the degree of importance that animal owners place on their pets at the time of evacuation for a disaster. Research conducted by the organisation using quantitative measures in Costa Rica, Mexico and Colombia determined that 75% of urban pet owners would not leave their pets behind during an evacuation, even if they only had five minutes to leave their household (Hesterberg, Huertas and Appleby 2012).

Considering this evidence, it would make sense that organisations try to address the needs of pets during all stages of the disaster cycle. Animal owners have the primary responsibility to look after their companion animals and are their first line of defence when disasters strike. However, institutions can and should support them in safeguarding the well-being of their animals during disasters. Governments need to ensure that their disaster risk management policies factor animals and coordination is in place with animal health authorities so that arrangements are made to keep animals safe, such as planning for their evacuation – this can be of particular importance for large animals such as livestock. Nevertheless, the factor that can make the most significant difference in an animal's welfare during a disaster is the level of understanding of its owner on how to protect them. Information is the most powerful tool we can offer pet owners and the campaign developed by World Animal Protection aimed at doing precisely that.



Photo 3 Image of Trueno for the campaign. World Animal Protection

Trueno, the dachshund

“Trueno”, which is Spanish for thunder, is the name of a dachshund who was the main character of a communication initiative implemented by World Animal Protection in 2012-2014 to promote a culture of resilience among urban animal owners in Costa Rica. In a Public Service Announcement, which was the central element of this campaign, Thunder simulated to speak (through voiceover from a narrator) to share with the audiences the measures he had undertaken to prepare for disasters.

The campaign was developed as part of a more comprehensive programme World Animal Protection was implementing with the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture and local Animal Health Service to strengthen national and local capacity for disaster risk management. Before this effort, risk reduction, preparedness and contingency planning in Costa Rica had rarely included animals. To improve this, the programme included the development of a legal framework, creating capacity within governmental institutions, and also encompassed disaster risk reduction activities to reduce the loss of livelihoods including livestock and working animals. The government recognized that alongside broader issues of protecting livestock, there was a need to support companion animals. It was therefore decided to launch a campaign to promote that pet owners undertake measures to protect them from disasters in cooperation with the Animal Health Services. It was understood that a comprehensive programme for disaster risk management that included animals, also required changing individual’s behaviours and supporting them to take responsibility for themselves and their pets. The campaign targeted pet owners in the great metropolitan area, where most pets are located. The target audience included urban population between 25 and 65 years, decision-makers or main buyers within their household, with a medium and high socio-economic status, approximately 30% of the national urban population, which was 3 million in 2012 (INEC, 2011) when the campaign started.

Costa Rica is a multi-hazard country, which experiences earthquakes on a regular basis, and is prone to both flooding and droughts in many areas. Urban areas are especially vulnerable to disasters, in particular to earthquakes and flooding, due to a variety of factors. As explained above, an increasing number of people worldwide have companion animals, and although official information about the number of pets in the country is not available, some studies have shown that Costa Rica is not the exception. A survey conducted by World Animal Protection in 2015 estimated there are more than 800,000 owned dogs in the great metropolitan area of Costa Rica, whereas the same study in 2011 estimated over 500,000 dogs. More than 50% of the households in Costa Rica own dogs (World Animal Protection, 2016). A survey conducted by the University of Costa Rica in 2017 estimated that

60.2% of the households in the country have dogs, of which 26.6% allow their dogs to roam alone in the streets, a total of 244 thousand homes (University of Costa Rica, 2017).

Qualitative research to shape messaging

The initial phase of the campaign was a countrywide investigation conducted in 2012 that surveyed 1,224 adults (error margin $\pm 2,80$ points, 95% confidence level) (Cid Gallup, 2012) and aimed to determine the level of preparedness of urban pet owners, based on some key measures:

Table 1 Percentage of owners that comply with preparedness measures in 2012 (CID Gallup, 2013)

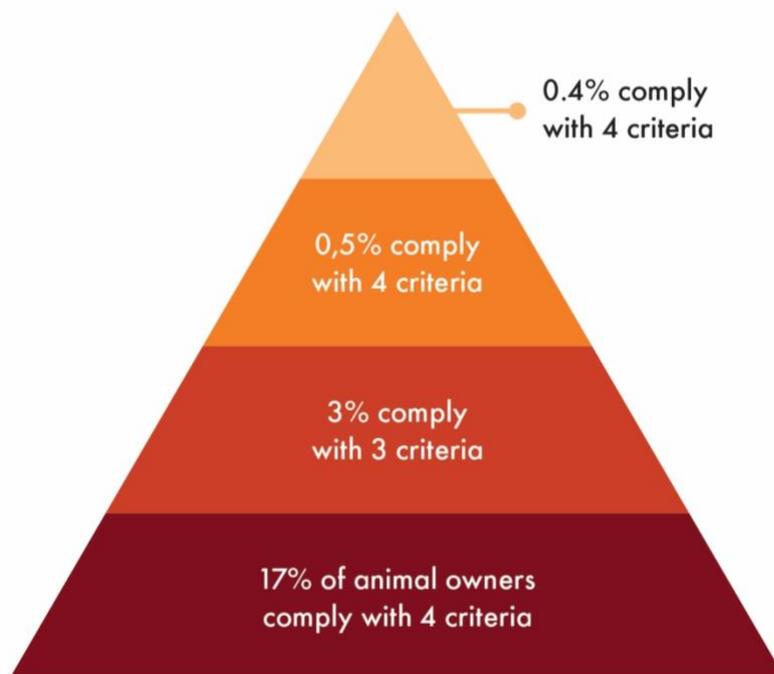
	Total %	Dogs %	Cats %
De-worming up to date	69	74	44
Vaccination up to date	68	74	39
Vaccination card	46	50	24
Kennel and or leash	15	14	8
ID Tag	5	6	1
Emergency Veterinary Kit	2	3	1
Emergency Plan	2	3	–

World Animal Protection streamlined and choose four key criteria to evaluate the level of preparedness, based on the profile of an ideal pet owner, meaning one that would comply with the four conditions:

- ID Tag with the owner´s contact information
- Kennel and leash
- Emergency kit in a secure container, including any prescription medication
- Friend or family member that could take care of the pet in case of evacuation

The research determined that less than 3% of all pet owners fulfilled even two of the four criteria and only 5% of the pets had ID Tags.

Table 2: Percentage of pet owners that comply with the criteria 2012 (Cid Gallup, 2013)



The communication initiative was designed to convey these simple measures so that people would be closer to the ideal pet owner profile.



Photo 4 Image of the campaign showing ID Tag and vaccination card. World Animal Protection

Communication tactics

The campaign's main element was a public service announcement (PSA), featuring Trueno, a friendly character that would call the attention of our audience towards family preparedness by announcing "he had his ID Card, his vaccinations and his kennel. It was going to have an evacuation drill with his family... but after taking a

nap first". The PSA was 30 seconds long so that it would fit the television format. The dachshund was selected as the main character, even though it is not the most common dog breed in Costa Rica (it is actually the mixed breed) because it is generally considered a friendly and relatable dog, but mainly because of its standard-looking features that facilitated to have three dogs during the filming of the announcement to reduce their stress.

The PSA was broadcasted via cable over three-month periods in 2012, 2013 and 2014. The advert aired on selected TV channels at both prime time and other times, based on ratings and our target audience, to ensure maximum exposure.

Based on rating estimations, the TV PSA reached 45% of our target audience, and each person viewed the advertisement an average of three times. In total, the advert was broadcasted over 6,000 times during the three-year campaign, with approximately 700 adverts per month. Our post assessment determined that 50% of the people had seen some advertising related to animal protection and 35% specifically remembered the Trueno PSA.

In addition, key messages were promoted on social media including Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, the campaign used short messages, such as "Do you know how to evacuate with me during a landslide?" with illustrative pictures to draw the attention of the audience to the World Animal Protection website. The website featured more detailed information for animal owners to download, such as what to do in specific emergencies or what to include in an emergency kit. People were also able to subscribe to a specific number and receive weekly tips via SMS.

The digital campaign was so successful that it was launched in Mexico as well, following a similar qualitative research study to determine the level of preparedness of animal owners in Mexico City. Facebook posts reached over four million people in Mexico and Costa Rica during the last quarter of 2014 alone. World Animal Protection's website had over 30,000 visitors just in this same three-month period. The SMS system was the least successful element of the campaign with only 600 subscribers and was therefore discontinued in 2013.

Campaign Results

The real impact of the campaign was the improved level of preparedness among urban pet owners in Costa Rica. The same quantitative research was repeated in 2013, 2014 and 2015 to assess if there was an increase in the percentage of animal owners closer to the ideal profile and taking specific measures that would protect their pets during a disaster.

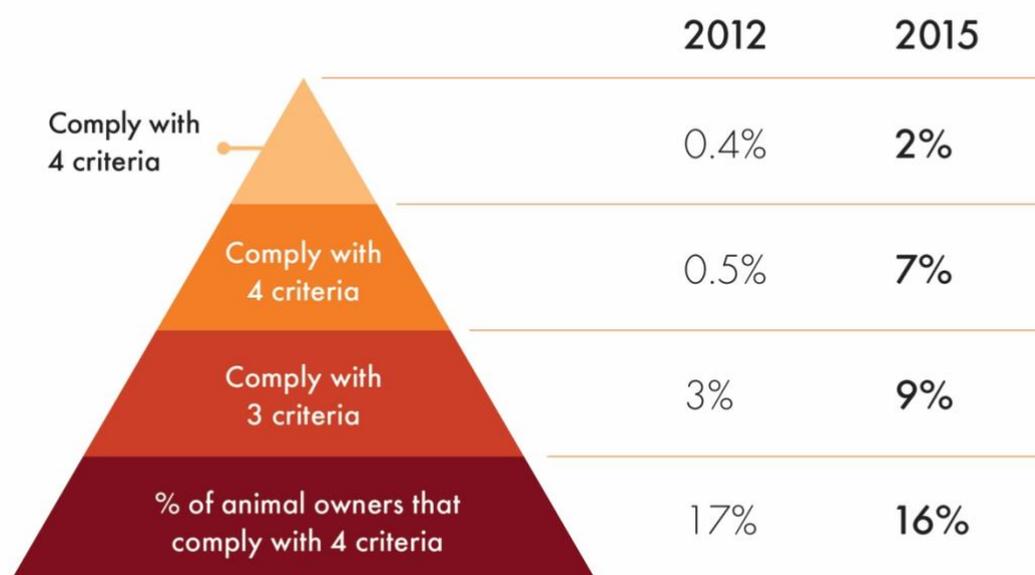
As shown in the tables below, based on a survey of 1,212 adults (margin error $\pm 2,8$, confidence level 95%), the assessment in 2015 showed that the number of people implementing at least one of the measures nearly

doubled. Specific criteria also improved, for example, the percentage of people with an emergency plan increased from 2% to 21% and those with an ID tag increased from 5% to 20%. (CID/Gallup, 2015). We

Table 3 Percentage of owners that comply with preparedness measures in 2015 (CID Gallup, 2015)

	Total % 2012	Total % 2013	Total % 2014	Total % 2015
De-worming up to date	69	76	80	83
Vaccination up to date	68	73	77	79
Vaccination card	46	52	53	58
Kennel and or leash	15	25	29	33
ID Tag	5	24	18	20
Emergency Veterinary Kit	2	9	11	16
Emergency Plan	2	7	16	21

It should be noted that the assessments pre and post campaign did not include a control group so it could not be scientifically proven that the increase in the percentage of people taking action is only the result of the campaign and not influenced by other factors as well. What can be said, is that World Animal Protection definitely saw an important trend towards increased preparedness in companion animal owners in Costa Rica, that the target audience was reached and that focusing on protecting pets can increase the attention towards the of disaster risk reduction messages.

Table 4: Percentage of pet owners that comply with the criteria 2015 (Cid Gallup, 2013)

Conclusions

World Animal Protection and its Animals in Disasters Programme work to ensure that both people and animals are safe from disasters. The organisation believes that helping animals helps people and have always aimed to increase the level of preparedness among animal owners. World Animal Protection operates under the assumption that owners cannot protect their animals without protecting themselves. This thesis is shared by Thompson (2014) that considers “animals may provide the kind of innovative approach required to overcome the challenges in accessing and engaging vulnerable groups. As the survival of humans and animals are so often intertwined, the benefits of increasing the resilience of vulnerable communities through animal attachment are twofold: human and animal lives can be saved together”.

The results of the Trueno Campaign are relevant for several reasons. Launching a campaign following an assessment of preparedness levels within the target audience, not only guarantees that messaging is shaped to cover the gaps in awareness and information, but following a rigorous annual assessment as the one conducted by World Animal Protection, is a way of showing results beyond ratings and media hits, as it touches on behavioural change. Even though, as explained above, the increase in the percentage of animal owners taking measures in Costa Rica cannot be attributed only to this campaign due to the lack of a control group, it is safe to say this

campaign had promising penetration results and that companion animal owners are increasing their awareness towards the importance of protecting their pets.

This trend, alongside the increasing importance of companion animals to society, is an opportunity for disaster risk management practitioners and experts to test new ways of speaking about risk reduction, through the link with protecting pets. Instead of thinking about animals as a risk factor, the bond between people and animals could be used to increase disaster preparedness (Thompson, 2013).

According to Thompson (2014), this effort could be of particular importance when speaking to vulnerable groups such as children, disabled or the elderly. "Encouraging vulnerable groups to think about emergency planning for their pet or animal could motivate them to prepare for themselves".

Furthermore, providing evacuation facilities that include pets might be a way to increase evacuation compliance. According to Edmonds and Cutter (2008) including pets into shelters and offering options for people to stay with their pets could increase the use of shelters during an evacuation.

Governments and institutions need to implement information campaigns that establish the animal owner's responsibilities for protecting them from disasters, but also need to establish disaster risk management policies that consider animals, including measures such as the availability of animal shelters for evacuation and coordinated efforts to reunite pets with their owners. These efforts should be a joint venture between governmental institutions, the private sector and the non-governmental sector. With an increasing population of pet owners, it is essential that the needs of this group are better understood by disaster risk management systems, as this would not only benefit message design and communication as shown in this campaign but also public engagement, health and safety (Day, 2017). According to Travers, Degeling and Rock, (2016), there is good evidence showing individuals and communities cope better during and after disasters when companion animals receive protection. Although as explained by Trigg et al. (2016) there are different styles of pet attachment and these could shape their response to disasters; there is enough evidence to state that considering the bond between animals and pets when communicating about disaster preparedness is effective.

People and governments need to work together to ensure that animals are protected from disasters. Not only to prevent the unnecessary suffering of living beings, but because failing to do so could have a direct impact on the prospects of recovery of their owners. Either because companion animal owners fail to evacuate without their pets and put themselves in danger trying to save them, or because the loss of the pet can have a direct impact in their emotional and psychological well-being.

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