

# Massey University VERT – responding to animal and owner needs in emergencies

PR Palleson-Putt

## Introduction

The Massey University Veterinary Emergency Response Team (VERT) is a specialist team of Massey University staff trained in animal disaster response, technical animal rescue as well as veterinary field triage and treatment. The team was established in 2010 and was one of the first veterinary emergency response teams in Australasia. The team is comprised of dedicated volunteer staff, all of whom are employed by Massey University. The team is comprised of veterinarians, veterinary nurses, and allied animal professionals.

The VERT team has several response capabilities. These include on-site veterinary assessment and triage, technical animal rescue, evacuation and relocation of animals, field euthanasia, and rapid welfare needs assessments. These capabilities extend to responding to local and regional responses for animal rescue, as well as national emergencies involving animals.

## Response types

The team deploys to two main types of responses. The first is an acute animal incident, where an animal requires immediate rescue or recovery. An acute animal incident requires immediate attention and is largely technical in nature. These types of responses include situations whereby an animal is physically entrapped or located in a confined space. This type of response may have a rope rescue component, whereby abseil is required to access the patient.

The second deployment type is during a disaster event, where the team is formally requested to deploy by the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI). MPI is the lead agency for animal welfare in a response. These events have a longer lead in time and are typically of a longer duration. The VERT team is a member of the National Animal Welfare Emergency Management (NAWEM) subfunction group and is one of the animal welfare support agencies. This group also includes the New Zealand Veterinary Association, Companion Animals New Zealand, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Federated Farmers, Animal Evac New Zealand, Helping You Help Animals, and the New Zealand Institute of Animal Management (MPI 2022).

## VERT team roles and responsibilities.

Operational team members undergo a recruitment process and attend regular trainings to ensure relevant skills are maintained. Operational members obtain the following qualifications or specialities: rope rescue, flood awareness and swift water rescue, and technical large animal rescue. At the present time, Massey University VERT is the only trained animal rescue team in New Zealand currently operational.

## Conclusion

The Massey University VERT team is a specialist animal rescue team and is currently the only team operational in New Zealand. The team responds to both acute animal incidents, and large-scale disaster events, and has an array of capabilities including on-site triage and assessment, emergency evacuation, technical rescue, field euthanasia, and welfare needs assessments.

## References

**MPI.** Animal welfare emergency management support agencies. Ministry for Primary Industries, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-emergency-management/animal-welfare-emergency-management-support-agencies/>