

NEWS

Rescuing horses

Class shows how to save animals during a disaster

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Published 12:23 a.m. ET July 17, 2003 | Updated 1:58 a.m. ET July 17, 2003

The possibility of hurricanes, sinkholes, flooding and road accidents not only puts people in danger, but also animals.

That's why about 60 local veterinarians, firefighters, emergency workers and volunteers attended a "large animal rescue training" session on Tuesday and Wednesday at the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine.

The course was taught by Tomas and Rebecca Gimenez of Clemson University's animal and veterinary science department in South Carolina.

"We had to do something to help animals in disasters," said Tomas Gimenez, who travels around the country giving the course, which includes lectures and hands-on demonstrations. One demonstration involved a horse trailer that was tipped over. Those in the class had to use pulleys and ropes to right the trailer.

No horses were used in that demonstration because it would have been too dangerous, Gimenez said.

Two horses and a llama were trained for the other demonstrations, which were held at the veterinary college's livestock pavilion.

There also was a night search-and-rescue exercise on Tuesday, which demonstrated how people can work together in the dark to safely recover a large, injured animal in a field, said Dana Zimmel, a UF assistant professor in the large animal clinical sciences department in the veterinary college.

Gimenez said the participants were told a horse that is trained to lay down had a broken leg and they had to bandage it, set a splint and put the horse on a stretcher.

Other demonstrations included rescuing horses from mud and water using cranes.

Gimenez said Florida has special problems related to equine safety.

"Each state is prone to different disasters," he said. "Florida has hurricanes."

He said after Hurricane Floyd, which hit from Florida to New England in September 1999, there was a jump in interest in large-animal safety courses in Florida. Now, the Gimenezes do more training in Florida than any other state.

Maria Gore, a veterinarian technician at the Large Animal Clinic, said she was surprised more attention in our area hadn't been directed toward large-animal safety.

"There's Ocala," Gore said. "That's one of the largest horse communities in the U.S."

Zimmel said that was one of the reasons why the course was planned, because more horses means a higher probability of accidents involving horses.

Helen Koehler, coordinator of the Southeastern Equestrian Trails Conference, said the course was offered as a pre-conference to the 10-state Trails Conference, which focuses on the use of horses on trails in the Southeast.

Koehler said the conference begins today at the Gainesville Paramount Resort and Conference Center (formerly the Sheraton) and will feature demonstrations, exhibits, speakers and workshops. For more information, go online to

