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## WVA Position Statement on Depopulation of Animals

### BACKGROUND

Recent events have shown that pandemics, disasters, notifiable disease outbreaks, and other emergencies, which are capable of disrupting supply chains, may require animal depopulation. Depopulation refers to the “rapid destruction of a population of animals in response to urgent circumstances with as much consideration given to the welfare of the animals as practicable.”<sup>1</sup> It differs from euthanasia or slaughter in that it occurs in response to a crisis situation, which requires balancing a rapid response and management of the emergency with animal welfare concerns attendant to humane killing. The impact of animal depopulation on human health and wellbeing and ecosystem health should not be overlooked.<sup>2,3</sup>

Disasters and emergencies often require rapid action, which may not allow optimal time to fully develop and review all aspects of depopulation plans. However, when situations are not as dire, (e.g., temporary market interruption) a fulsome review of the plans and the consequences to animal and human welfare is required.

### WVA POSITION

Planning for situations that necessitate depopulation of animals should be part of disaster preparedness at local, regional, national, and international levels. In all cases it is imperative that qualified veterinarians be intimately involved in the process, to guide decisions that ensure animal depopulation will be rapid, distress-free and painless, using optimal animal handling and approved euthanasia methods, whenever possible. In addition, veterinary medical response teams should be integrated into planning and response capabilities at all levels. At minimum, disaster and emergency response teams should include qualified veterinarians to ensure that animal needs are appropriately handled at all stages of the process. Alternative approaches to depopulation, such as animal vaccination, compartmentalization of animal populations, and animal recovery from disease, should be considered and incorporated within emergency response strategies, when possible.

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#### References

1. <https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/resources/AVMA-Guidelines-for-the-Depopulation-of-Animals.pdf>
2. Guidelines on disaster management - oie. World Organization for Animal Health. (n.d.). Retrieved December 10, 2021, from <https://www.oie.int/app/uploads/2021/03/disastermanagement-ang.pdf>.
3. Good emergency management practice: The Essentials. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (n.d.). Retrieved December 10, 2021, from <https://www.fao.org/3/ba0137e/ba0137e.pdf>.