

Communication from Public

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Comments for Public Posting: In March 2025, the Los Angeles Equine Advisory Committee submitted its assessment and recommendations for large animal evacuation, including the response from the over 60 unpaid volunteers helping to care for large animals at the two Los Angeles emergency evacuation centers.

LARGE ANIMAL EVACUATION AND CARE DURING JANUARY 2025 WILDFIRES

INCIDENT ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT



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March 17, 2025

The Los Angeles Equine Advisory Committee was formed to work with city departments in addressing equine issues in Los Angeles, retaining a legacy of institutional knowledge on equine affairs and community relations. In times of crisis, it is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between city emergency procedures and the equestrian community, ensuring that equine-specific needs are considered in emergency planning and response efforts. This report outlines key challenges, recommendations, and collaborative strategies that include the integration of equestrian concerns into the city's emergency framework.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Los Angeles Equine Advisory Committee gratefully acknowledges the participation of:

The hundreds of volunteers who dedicated thousands of hours to caring for the horses, as well as those who generously donated hay, feed, shavings, and equipment for animal care.

The Los Angeles Equestrian Center, Pierce College and Hansen Dam Horse Park for opening their facilities to evacuees.

The Council office of Monica Rodriguez for her dedicated engagement in the evacuation cycle.

The Council office of Nithya Raman for her support and recognition of the needs of the equestrian community.

The Department of Animal Services for staffing both Hansen Dam Horse Park and Los Angeles Equestrian Center.

The Los Angeles Fire Department and Los Angeles Police Departments for their valiant efforts to keep everyone safe during this unprecedented event.

The Department of Recreation and Parks for their crucial role in providing safe and accessible spaces for emergency large animal sheltering.

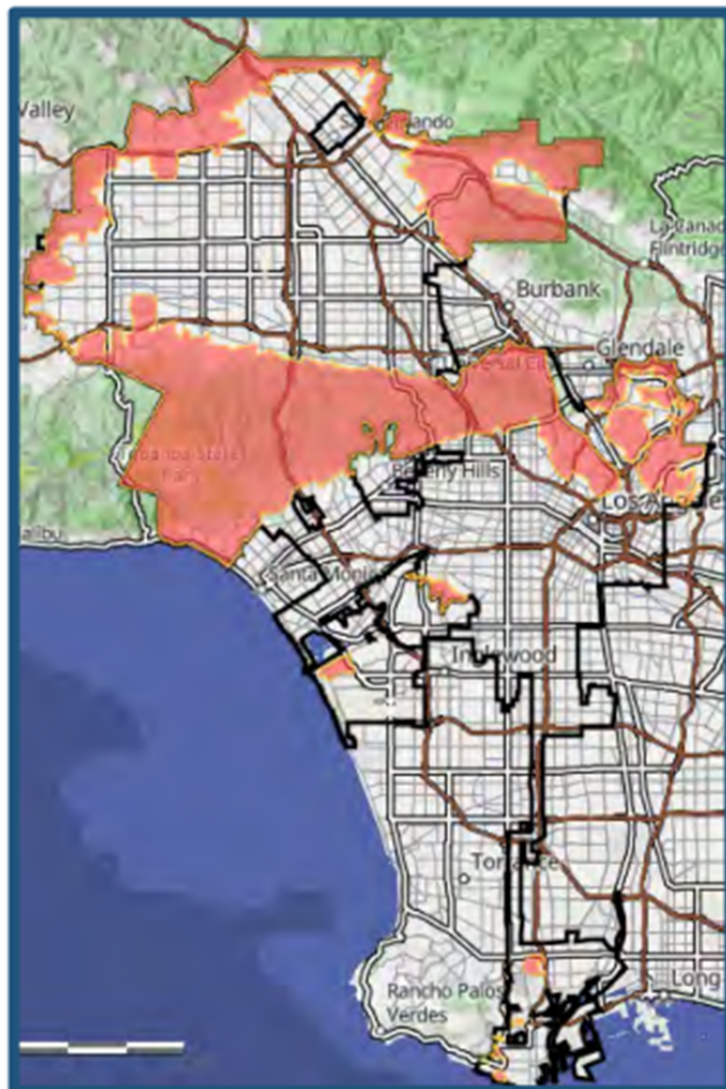
I. Overview

The Los Angeles' urban-wildland interface is home to a significant equestrian community, where many horse owners board their animals at public or private stables with access to trails and fire roads. Unlike those who keep horses at home, these owners often rely on stable staff for daily care and emergency management.

A common challenge during wildfires is the logistical difficulty of evacuating horses. Many horse trailers are parked at boarding facilities, while the towing vehicles remain at the owners'

residences, creating delays in mobilization. On average, horse owners require 2-4 hours to reach their animals in evacuation areas. Mandatory evacuation orders restrict access, preventing owners from assisting in the evacuation of their own animals. Additionally, evacuation horse trailers can obstruct emergency responders, making coordinated evacuations essential.

As a result, horse owners depend heavily on volunteer groups and city-deployed emergency response teams for evacuation assistance during wildfire events. The following facilities served as designated shelters for evacuated animals: **Los Angeles Equestrian Center, Pierce College and Hansen Dam Horse Park.**



The following findings and recommendations are primarily focused on city-owned and operated facilities in Los Angeles.

II. Findings

Findings are based upon observed operations and feedback during the January 2025 wildfire events regarding coordination, animal handling, volunteer management, and operational logistics.

1. Emergency Operations Plan

- Key personnel were unfamiliar with Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) Mass Care and Sheltering Annex - Large Animal Support Appendix.
- Volunteers, evacuees and City Staff operated with limited knowledge of the EOP Emergency Alert and Warning Functional Support Annex.
- EOP does not identify Hansen Dam Horse Park and Los Angeles Equestrian Center as City Assets.
- EOP assumes livestock owners will take necessary precautions to evacuate and provide care at evacuation sites.

2. VEERT Activation and Coordination

- VEERT volunteers were not activated, resulting in:
 - Decreased ability to respond to requests for onsite evacuations
 - Animal care duties were staffed by unregistered volunteers at temporary emergency shelter sites.
 - Insufficient staffing for Animal Services evacuation sites.
- Lack of onsite training for NON-VEERT volunteers for animal care and handling.
- Absence of web presence to recruit, train and maintain volunteers for large animal mass care and sheltering.

3. Large Animal Support Appendix

- Existing protocols limited animal control technicians in feeding and handling horses, (except stallions), leaving care procedures to external volunteers.
- Lack of Stallion Handling Protocols in Large Animal Support Appendix
 - The absence of designated stallion handlers required external/volunteer coordination, highlighting the need for pre-identified personnel.
 - Disturbance and danger were created due to stallions not being housed separately, underscoring the importance of refining stallion sheltering protocols for safety.

4. City Volunteer Liaison not staffed at LAEC During Emergency Events

- A formalized volunteer management structure is needed to provide greater efficiency, as equestrians and various community members self-organized during the response.

5. No Disaster Service Worker Aide Support for Livestock

- City Employees' DSW program was not available,

6. Equipment and Supplies Not On Hand

- Equipment and Supplies were provided by volunteers and donations
- Deployment of Golf Cart Utility Aided Volunteer animal care Tasks
 - The use of a flatbed golf cart significantly aided volunteers in mucking and feeding tasks, demonstrating their value in a large-scale emergency response.

7. Department of Transportation Involvement

- No evidence of coordination with DOT for traffic management of evacuation routes as described in Large Animal Support Appendix

8. Clarification of Activation Protocols and Site Duties During Initial Evacuation Chaos

- Lack of clearly defined division of duties between Animal Services and Temporary Large Animal Evacuation Sites resulted in conflict, gaps, and overlaps in work assignments and management.
- The lack of an interim emergency response protocol resulted in increased confusion during the initial surge of evacuees before official site activation.

9. Expanding Animal Care Technician Training and those with Large Animal Experience

- Technicians lacked functional expertise in feed identification and handling that would further support animal care efforts.
- Limited staff with large animal handling expertise.

10. Animal Intake Procedures

- No current system for paper receipts, digital photos, and a numbering system for animals which would strengthen intake tracking.
- The intake form lacks a designated field to record specific feed requirements for evacuated horses.

11. Volunteer Involvement in Supply Chain

- Reliance on volunteers to manage feed and supplies that were donated without a known acquisition system or control by Animal Services.

12. Limited Availability of Trained Large Animal Medical Personnel on site

- Lack of preparation in acquiring trained medical personnel onsite.

13. Zoonotic Disease Monitoring

- Lack of temperature checks and disease monitoring to enhance biosecurity efforts.

14. Decontamination Practices

- No observed plan for decontaminating equipment and tools to mitigate contamination risks.
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III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Emergency Management Department

- **Create a Pre-Activation Communication & Notifications Plan triggered by Red Flag Warnings for Large Animal Evacuation**
 - Alert Animal Services Specialized Mobile Animal Rescue Team (SMART) Leader.
 - Assure preparedness and UPDATE Large Animal Facility Readiness & availability at Large Animal Evacuation Sites including stall capacity and emergency supplies inventory.
 - Notify VEERT transportation and Mass Care and Sheltering Units
 - Notify DOT to prepare to deploy for traffic control at Large Animal Evacuation Sites to control flow patterns and ensure operational readiness.
- **Revise Large Animal Evacuation Annex**
 - Establish clear VEERT activation protocols.
 - Include Stallion Handling Protocols.
 - Develop a Pre-Activation Intake policy that establishes an interim Emergency Intake process allowing site managers to temporarily accept animals under defined emergency conditions.
 - Verify ownership information for Hansen Dam and Los Angeles Equestrian Center
- **Add a Large Animal Evacuation Inter-Departmental Coordination Plan to the Annex**
 - Clearly define City Department roles and responsibilities involved during large animal evacuation operations.
 - Task Force must include - Department of Recreation and Parks staff, staff contractors operating equestrian centers and Animal Services
- **Designate Temporary Holding Sites**
 - Identify additional sites such as West Valley Animal Shelter for overflow sheltering.
 - Report on the feasibility of identifying alternative sites for the evacuation of large animals in the event that city evacuation sites are compromised.

B. Department of Animal Services

- **Designate an Onsite large Animal Evacuation Coordinator Responsible for Overseeing:**
 - Large Animal Evacuation

- Mass Care and Sheltering
- Volunteer Equine Emergency Response Team (VEERT)
- Readiness/Activation
- Evacuation Site Coordination
- **Verify Emergency Supply and Equipment Provisions**
 - Restock essential supplies, including wheelbarrows, mucking tools, first aid kits, and stud chains.
 - Develop a contingency plan for ensuring water access to horses in the event of water supply damage, including the use of water trucks as a backup resource.
 - Ensure the deployment of flatbed golf cart to support volunteers with mucking, feeding, and other animal care tasks during large-scale emergency responses.
- **Coordinate With Feed Suppliers.**
 - Coordinate with feed suppliers to ensure a timely and reliable supply of hay, grain, and essential feed, preventing shortages during emergencies.
 - Pre-Stage Supply Caches for Emergencies.
 - Develop an organized supply and distribution system.
- **Conduct Regular Site Visits & Compliance Checks**
 - Perform quarterly site visits and verify compliance with evacuation protocols.
- **Volunteer Management Preparedness**
 - Assign and train VEERT volunteers
 - Update training schedules
 - Maintain VEERT contact roster quarterly
 - Conduct annual VEERT Drill
 - Recruit DSW staff with large animal experience
- **Incident Staff Training**
 - Ensure all staff are adequately trained for large animal handling.
- **Pre-Activate During Red Flag Warnings & Emergency Notifications**
 - Maintain updated evacuation readiness
- **Pre-Assign Staff to deploy During Emergency Activation to include:**
 - Volunteer Liaison
 - On-site LAAS Supervisor
 - 24 Hour on-site animal control officer
 - 24 Hour registered veterinarian or registered vet technician
 - Clerical staff for intake and records maintenance Contact
 - City Personnel for activation of qualified DSW workers
- **Equine Emergency Training for EMC Staff**
 - Provide specialized training to emergency managers on equine handling, sheltering logistics, and evacuation coordination to improve decision-making and deployment efficiency.

- **Unified Communication System Implementation**
 - Implement a real-time communication platform (e.g., text alerts or an app) for equine evacuation updates, status reports, and volunteer coordination.
- **Formal Stallion Management Guidelines**
 - Ensure proper sheltering protocols for stallions that includes stallion segregation requirements, proper enclosures and pre-identified personnel trained in stallion handling.
- **Equine-Specific Incident Response Unit**
 - Maintain a dedicated animal care team within the EMC or LA Animal Services trained in equine evacuation, sheltering, and tracking during disasters; replacing the current system of assigning various animal care technicians with limited or no knowledge of ongoing evacuation operations and procedures.
- **Standardized Intake & Identification System**
 - Provide technical resources necessary for accurate and efficient execution of tasks, including:
 - Computers & Tablets for digital intake, record-keeping, and volunteer management.
 - Cameras for photographing animals.
 - Microchip Scanners with thermal detection for quick identification and tracking of animals upon arrival and biosecurity.
 - Assign animal numbering system for streamlined tracking.
 - Portable Printers for generating physical intake receipts and stall identification tags.
 - Two-Way Radios for improved communication among staff, volunteers, and emergency personnel.
 - Implement digital records and tracking methods for all animals.
 - Attach the horse's name, emergency contact information, dietary needs, an indicator of whether the horse owner will provide feed, and any medical issues to the stall for quick reference during emergencies.
 - Add a dedicated feed requirement field to intake forms and digital tracking system that specifies: feed type, quantity, and any dietary restrictions.
- **Improved Coordination with DOT**
 - Ensure automatic DOT deployment for traffic and evacuation logistics.
- **Annual Fire & Evacuation Drills**
 - Schedule full-scale emergency exercises.
 - Establish City-Sanctioned Evacuation Drill Days: Partner with LAFD to certify barns as “Response Ready” based on participation in annual evacuation drills.
 - Encourage equestrian centers to host “Go Drill Days” to increase awareness and preparedness.
- **Enhanced Biosecurity Protocols**
 - Implement disease monitoring and decontamination procedures.

- **Donations Management**
 - Assign a Donations Coordinator and create a structured system.

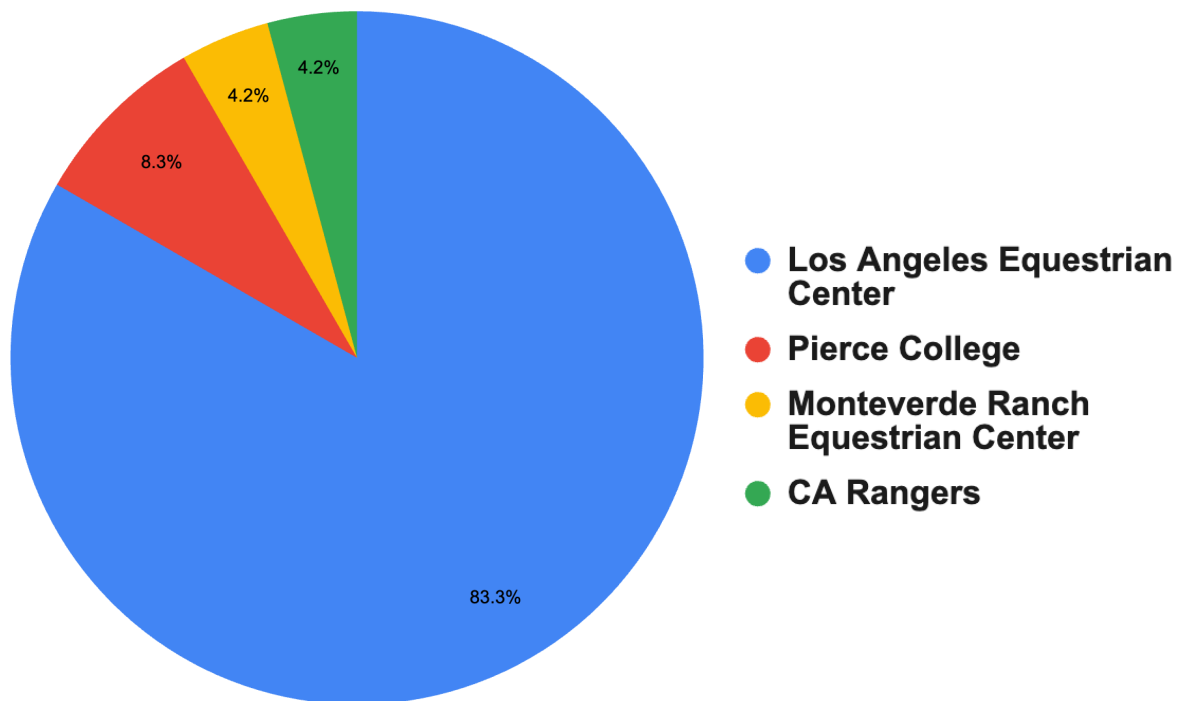
C. Inter Departmental Coordination

- **Volunteer Management System**
 - Develop and offer fire education workshops, equine first aid courses, and emergency preparedness training to better equip volunteers and equestrian facility operators.
 - Introduce Standardized Volunteer Credentials and Recognition: Issue official ID cards to registered volunteers who complete recommended training programs.
 - Establish a text and email messaging system to alert VEERT volunteers (e.g., "Please be prepared for a request to deploy.").
 - Establish a hotline/Information portal for trained volunteers to offer their services and availability.
 - Establish a distinct volunteer category, within Recreation and Parks and Animal Services, specifically for large animal evacuation site volunteers.
 - Instruct potential non-official large animal evacuation volunteers to pre-register with the LA Parks Foundation to become authorized volunteers at the park.
- **Post-Emergency Reports & After-Action Reviews**
 - Conduct reviews to improve future responses.

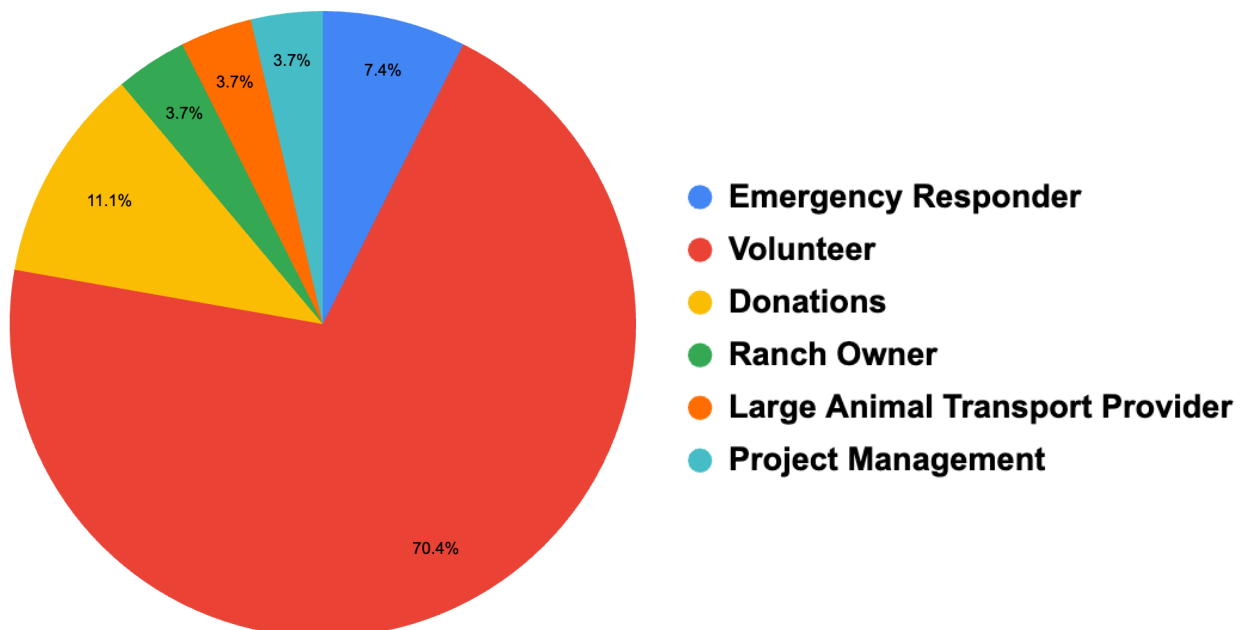
LAEAC AD Hoc Committee | Large Animal Evacuation Readiness Survey | Responses

This survey captures firsthand experiences from 28 individuals directly involved in large animal evacuation efforts, providing critical insights from those on the ground. While the sample size is small, the findings highlight recurring themes and key areas for improvement that can inform future emergency planning. With input from experienced volunteers, animal owners, and emergency responders, this survey offers a practical perspective on evacuation challenges and improvements. This survey serves as a foundation for deeper community engagement and policy discussions around large animal evacuation preparedness.

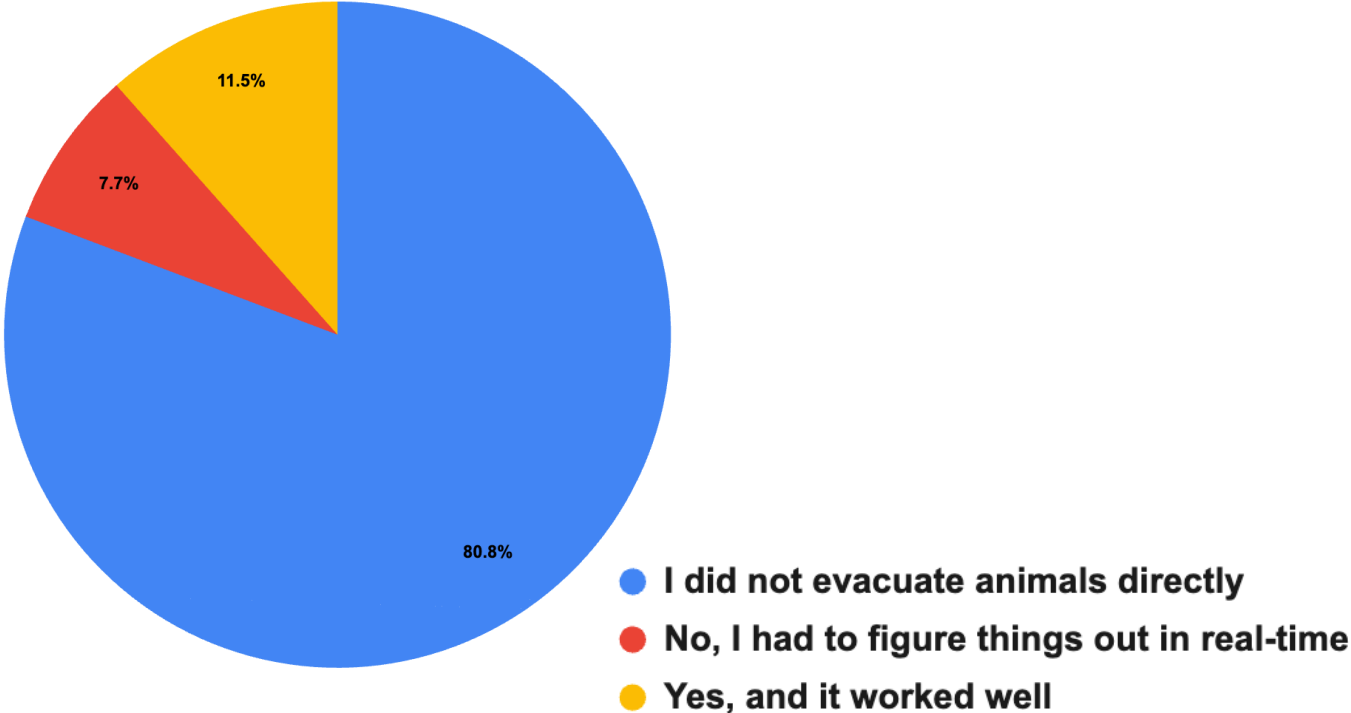
Where did you volunteer?



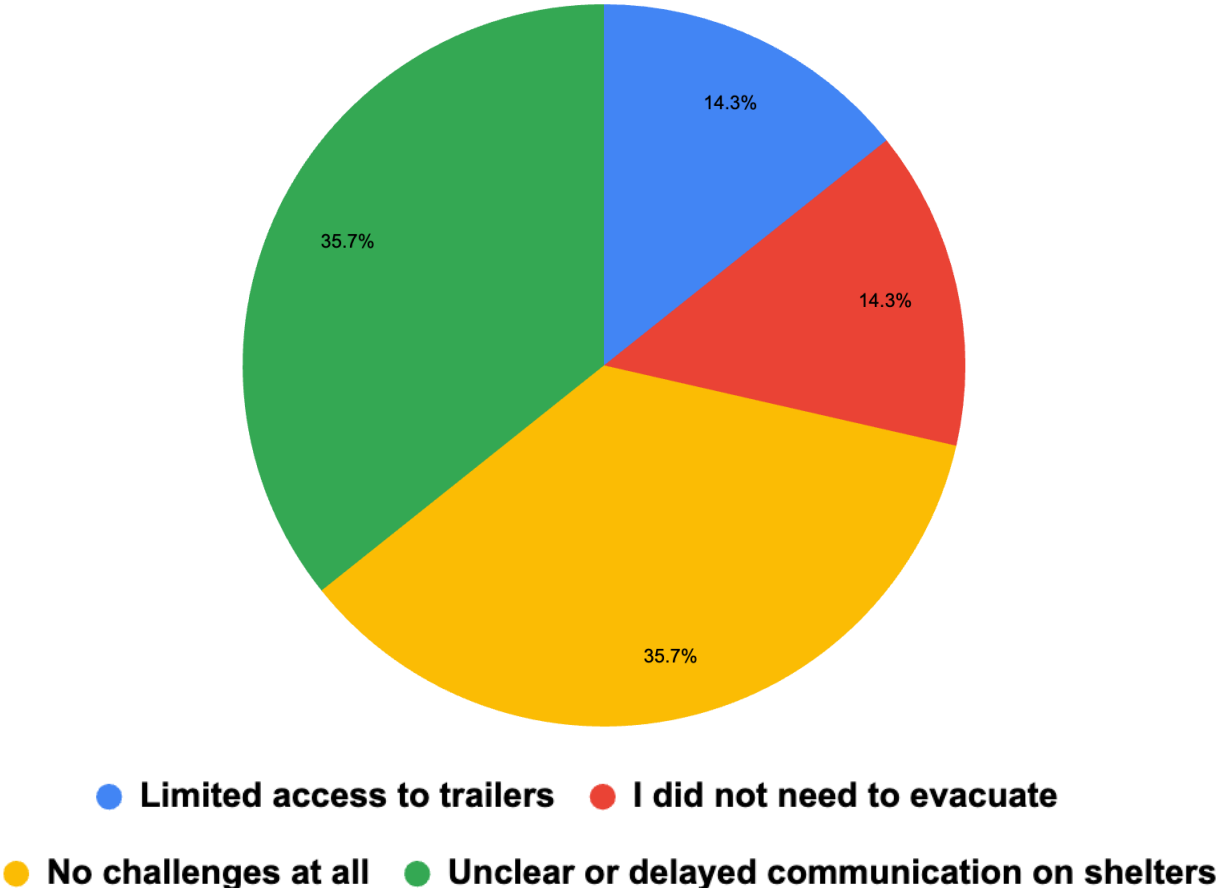
What was your primary role in the evacuation effort?



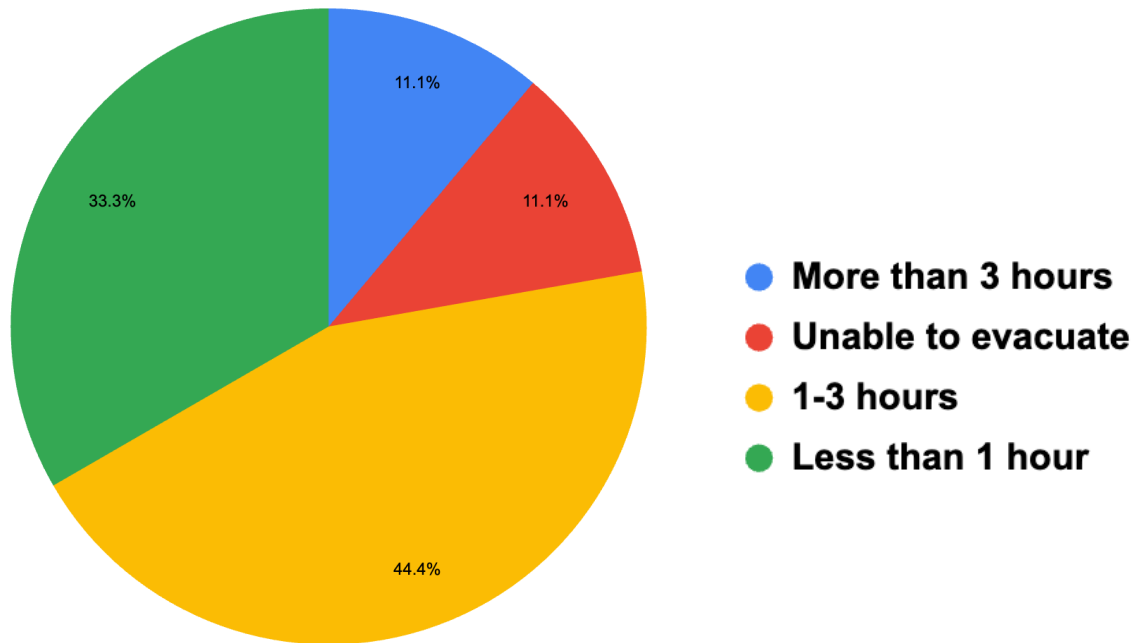
Do you have a pre-existing emergency evacuation plan for your animals?



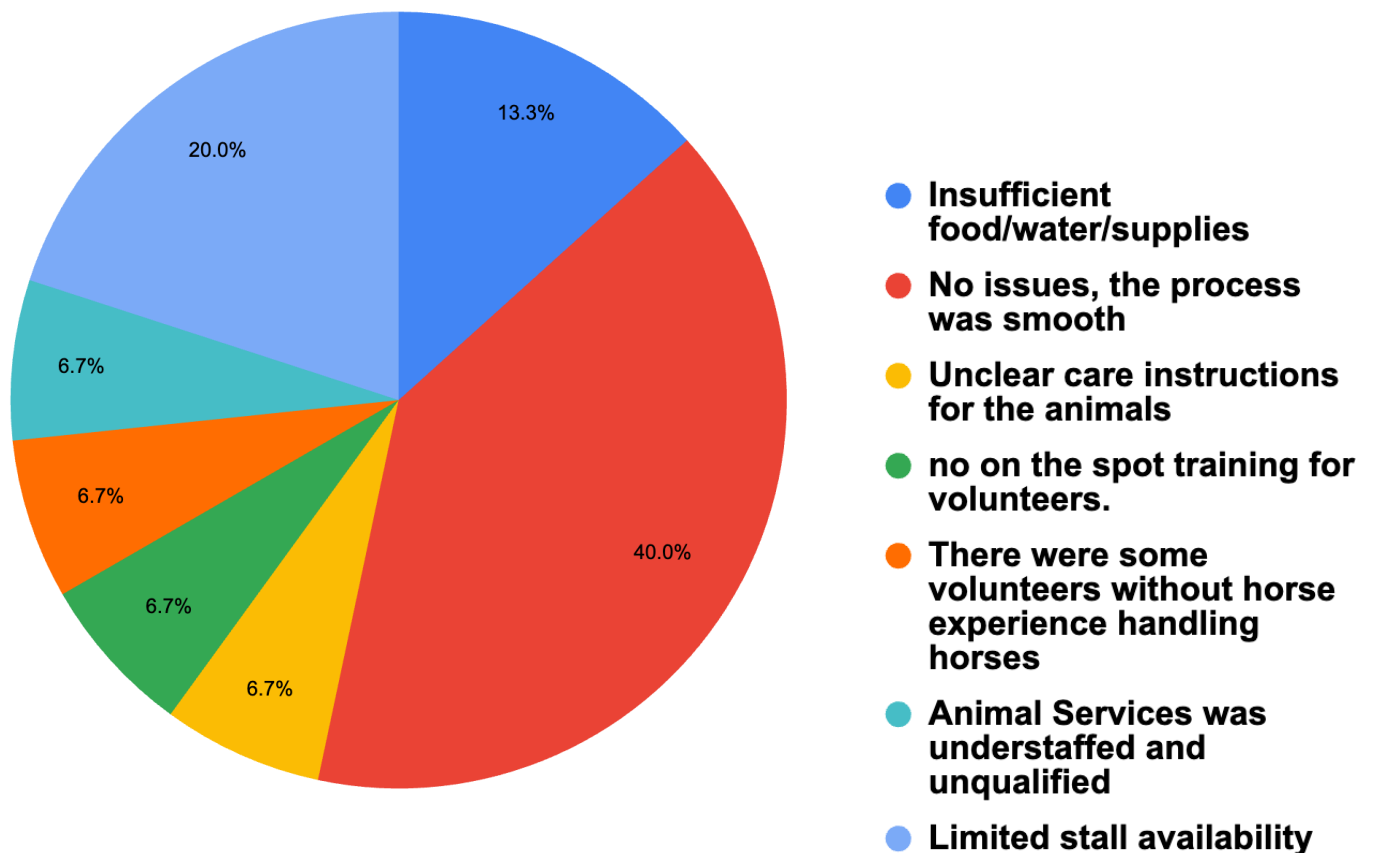
What challenges did you face during the evacuation process?



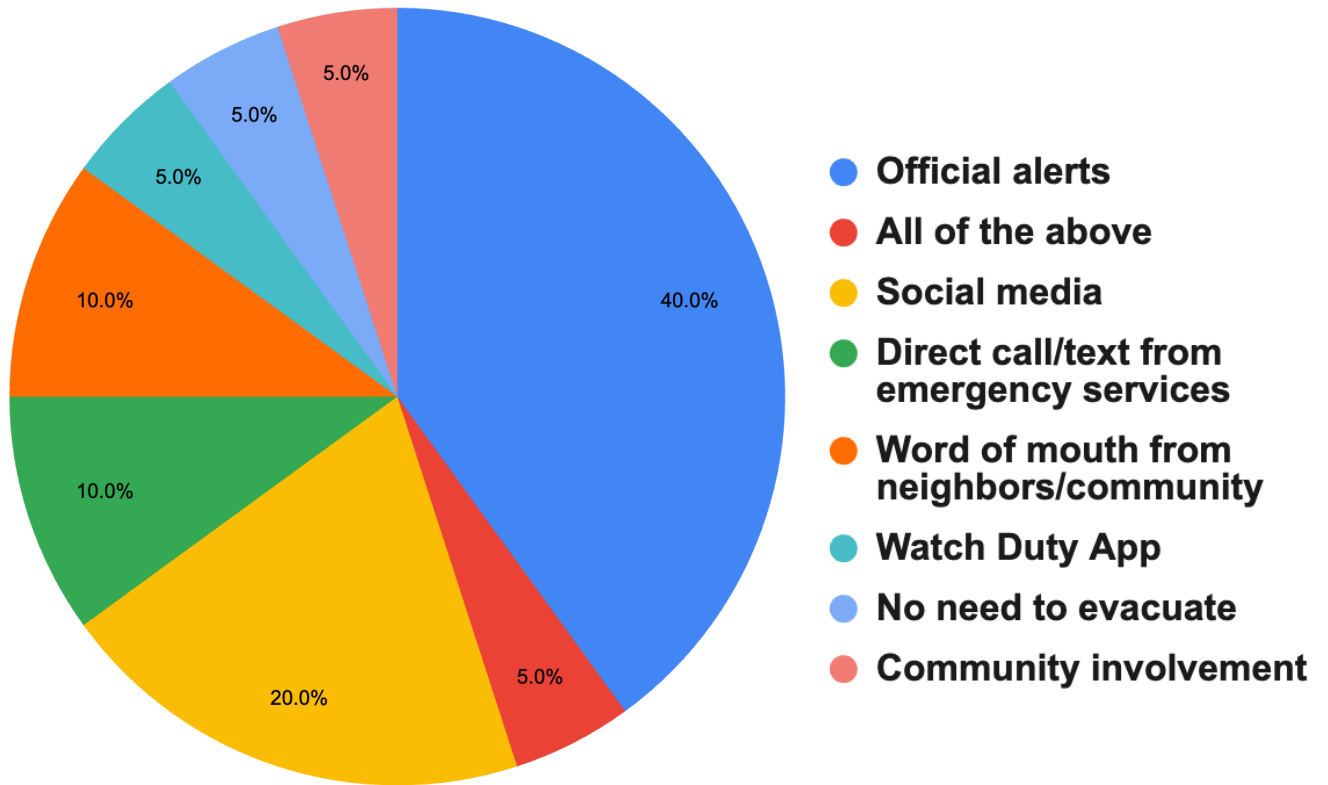
How long did it take to evacuate your animals?



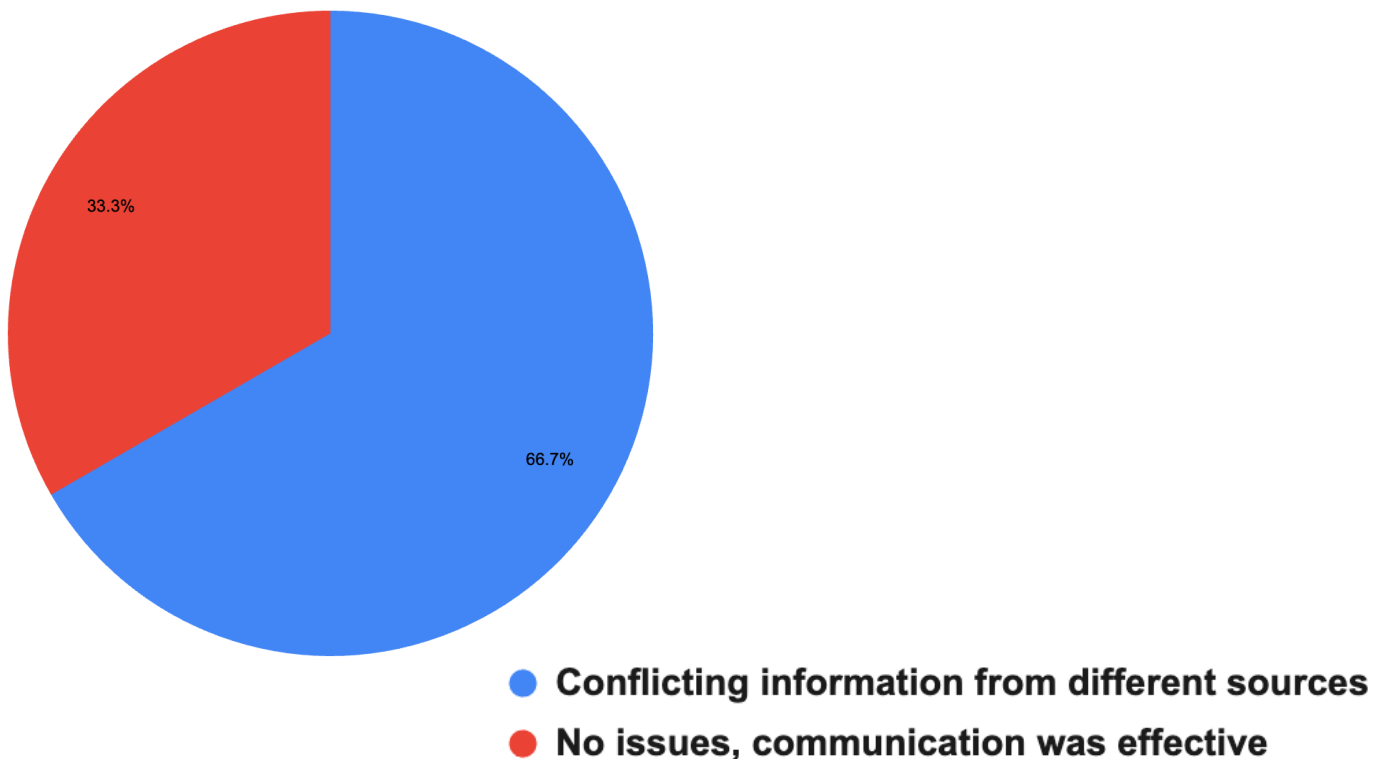
If you handled animals, did you encounter any issues at evacuation sites?



How did you receive emergency evacuation notices?

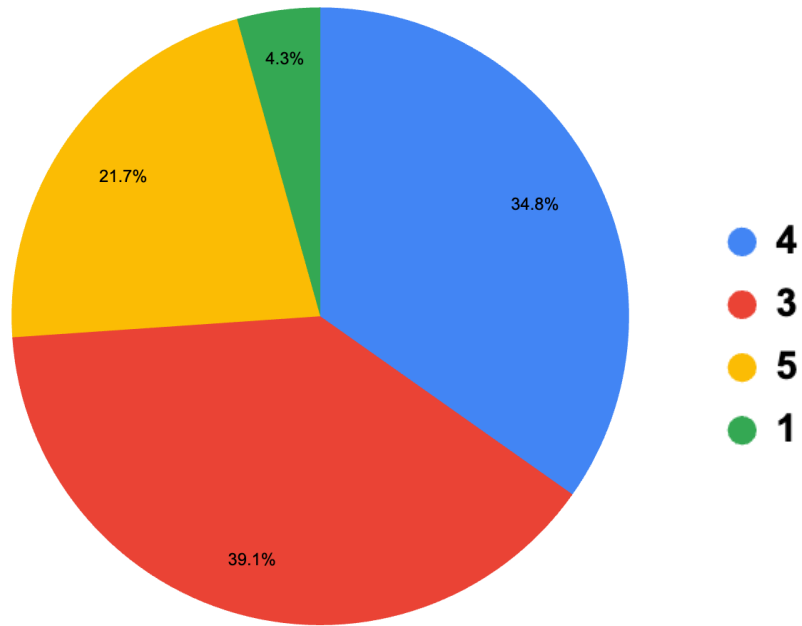


Did you experience any communication breakdowns?

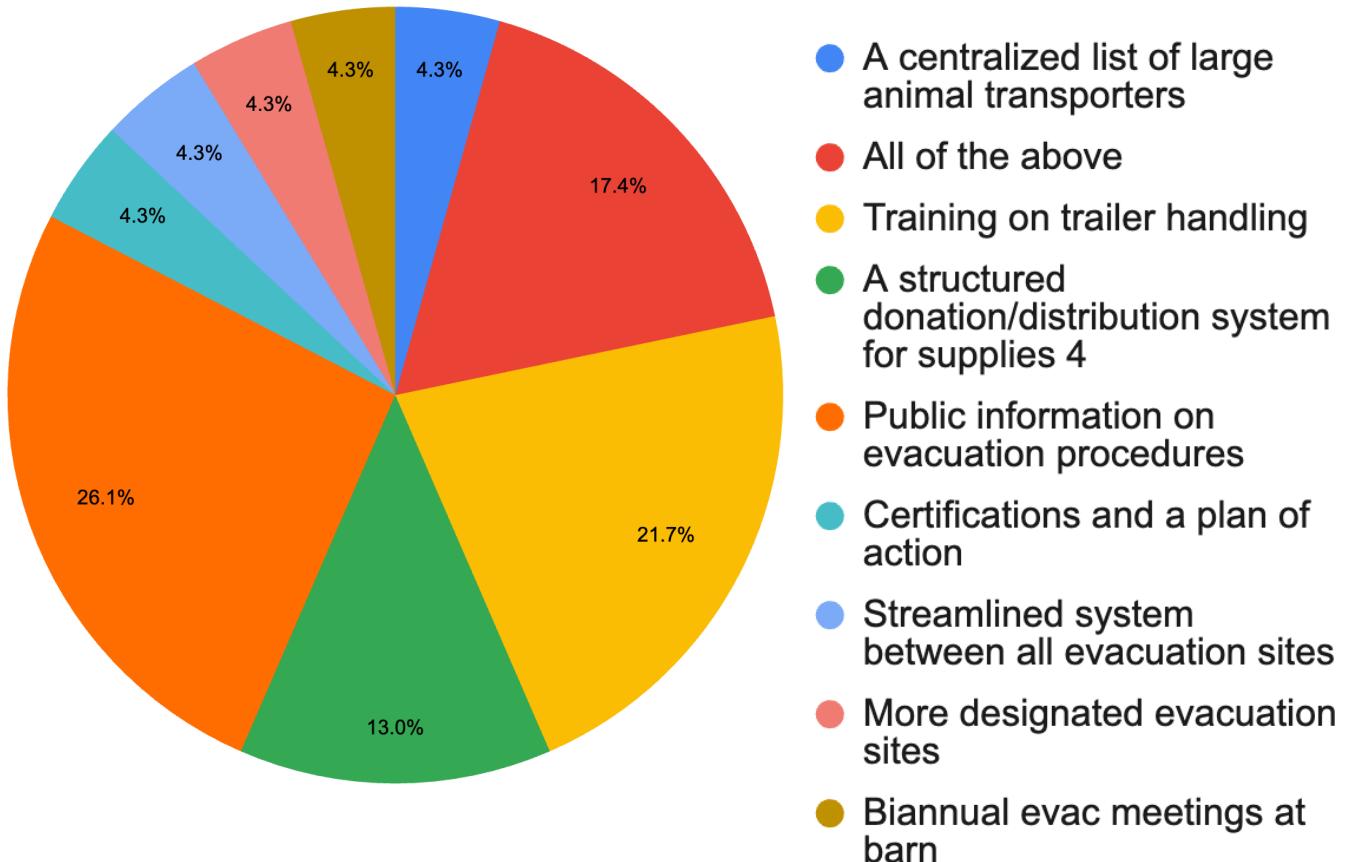


How would you rate the overall effectiveness of designated evacuation sites?

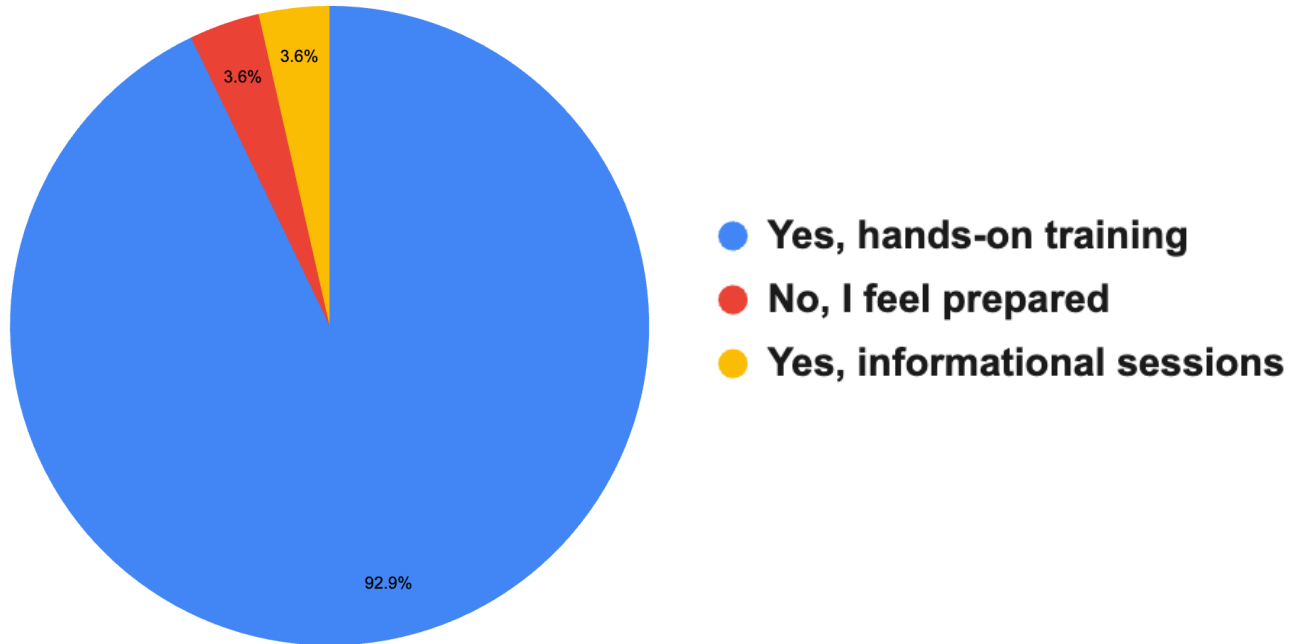
(1 poor | 5 excellent)



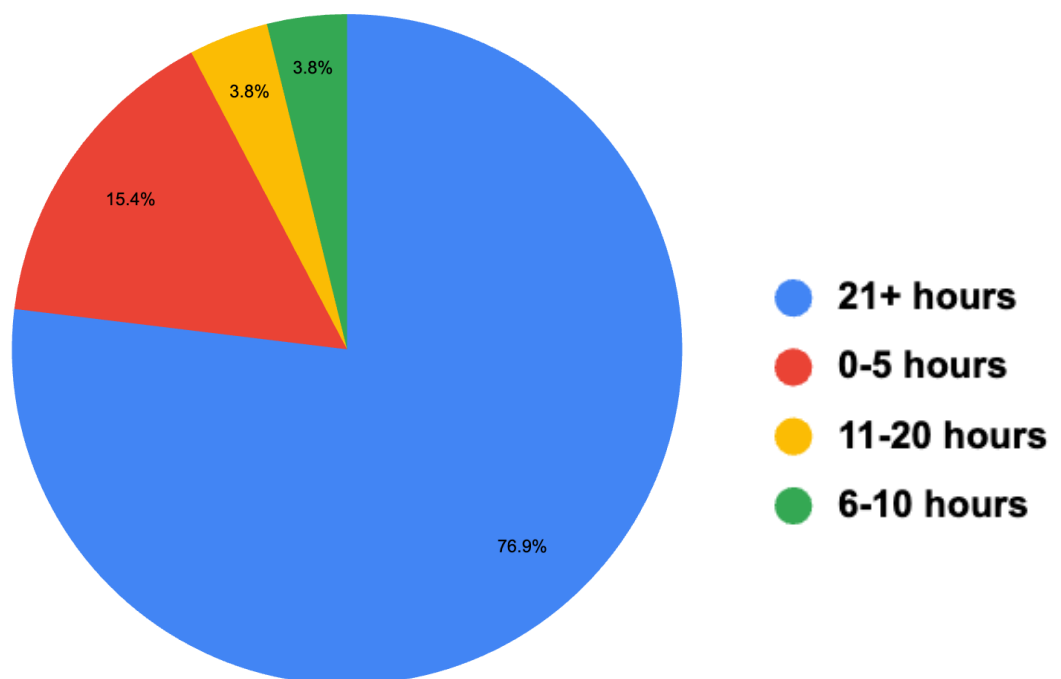
What resources would help you better prepare for future evacuations?



Would you participate in future training or drills?

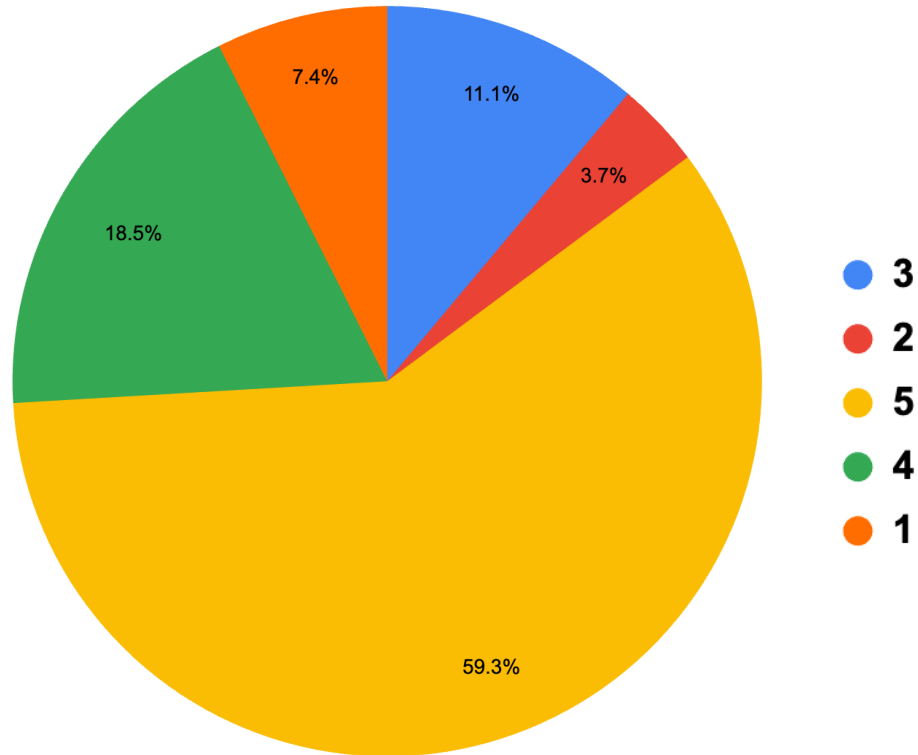


How many volunteer hours did you contribute?

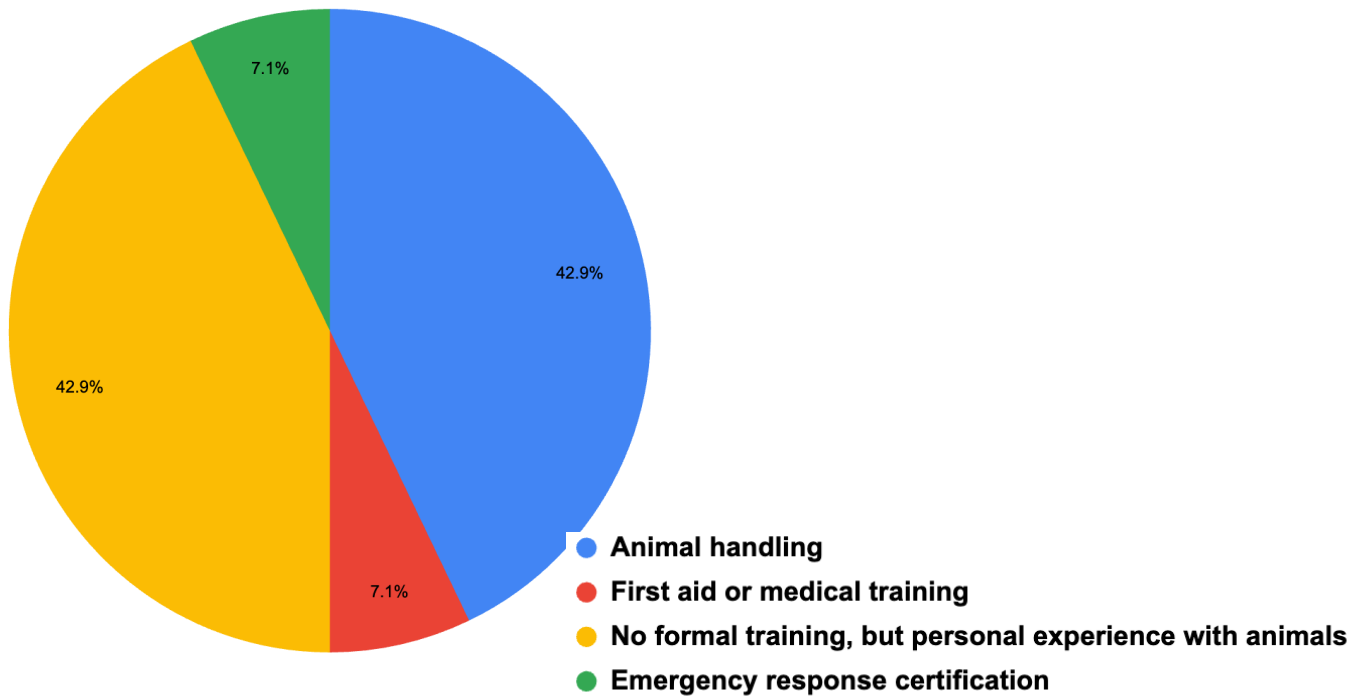


I feel confident in my ability to handle animals during an emergency evacuation.

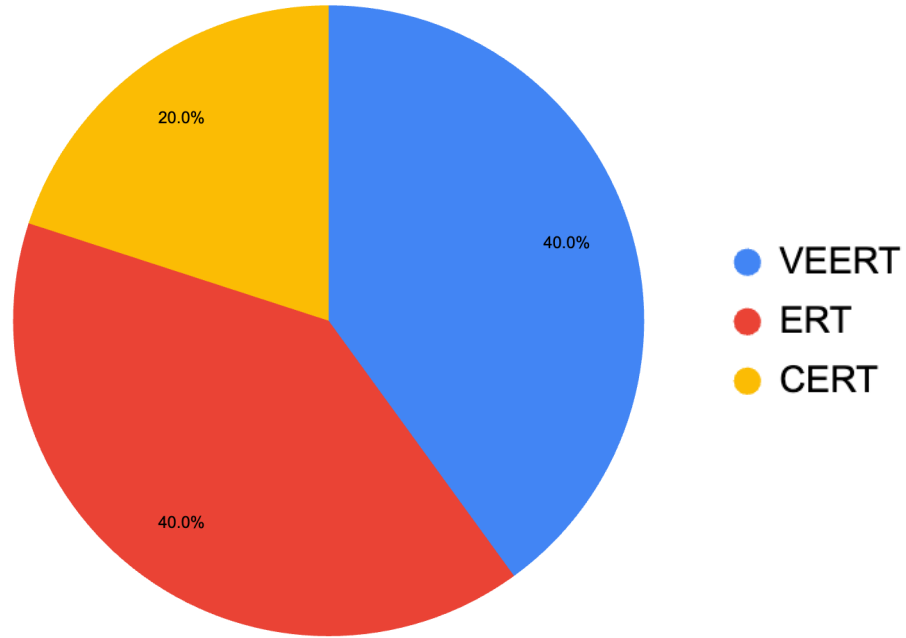
1 Strong Disagree | 5 Strongly Agree



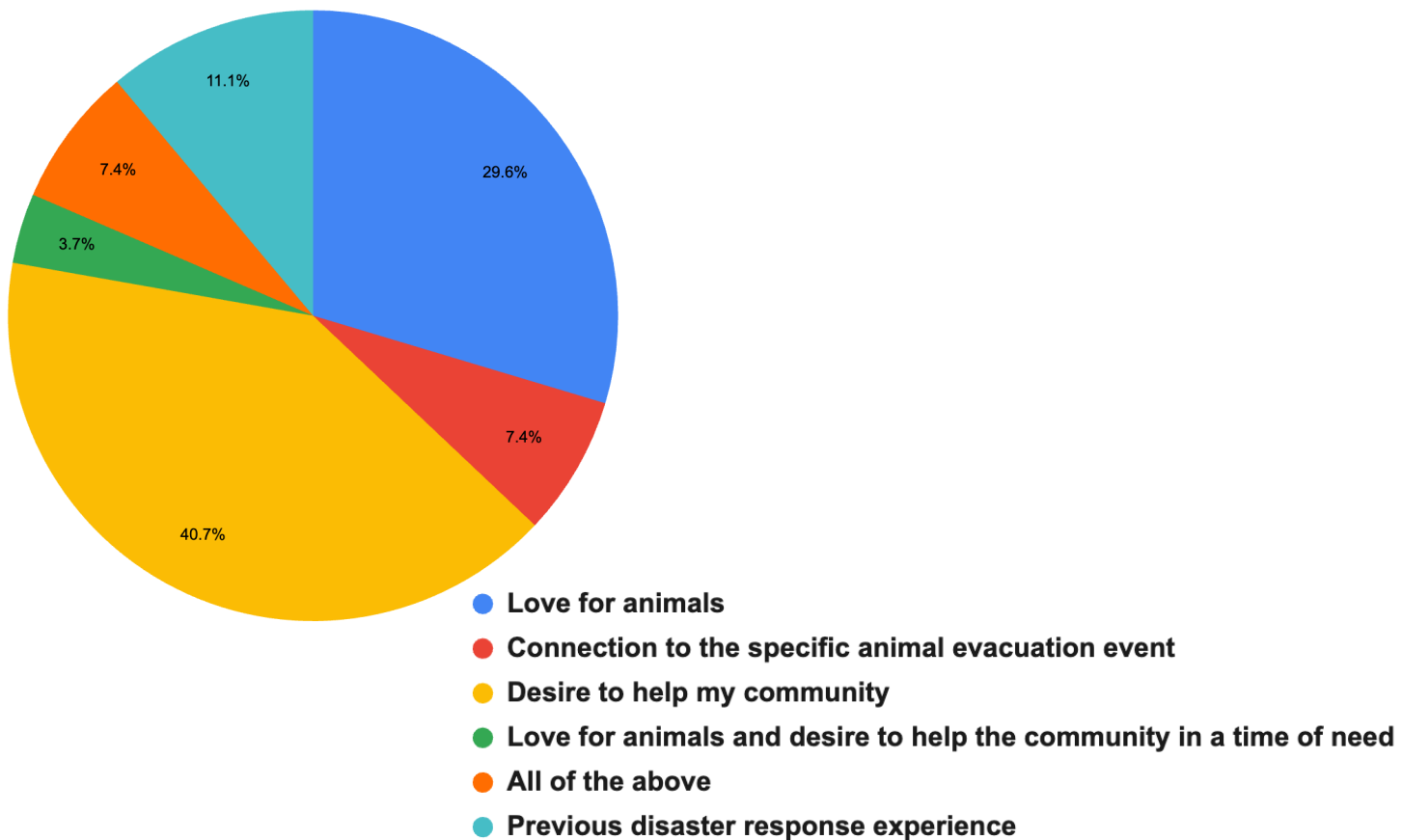
What specific training or experience did you have prior to volunteering?



Are you certified in any of the following?

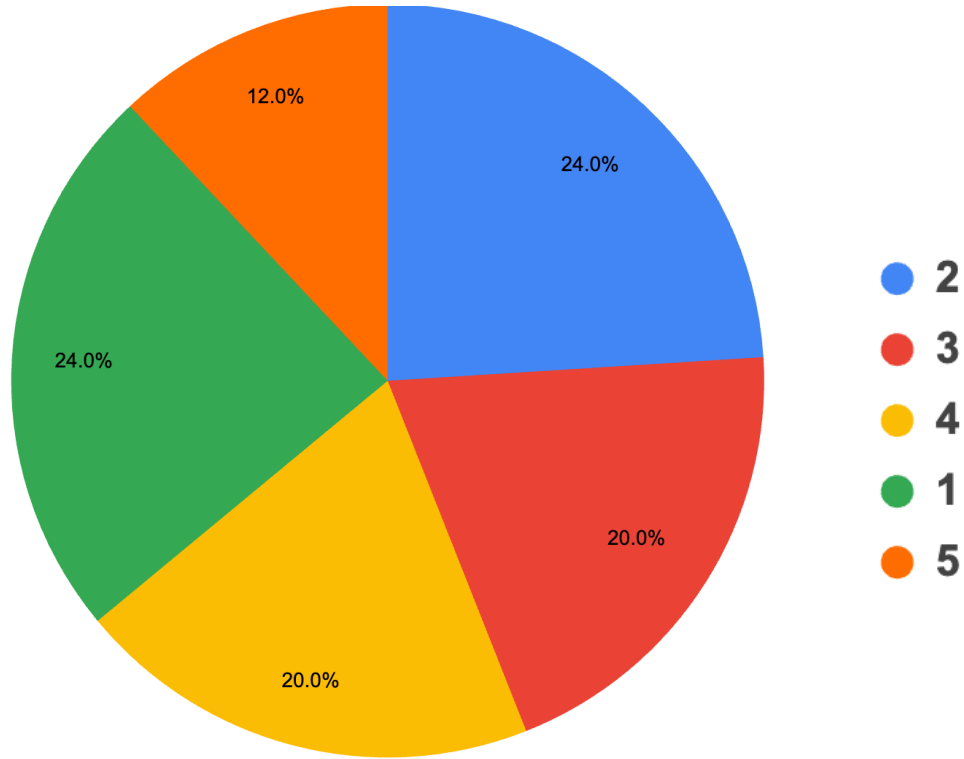


What was your primary motivation for volunteering in this evacuation?

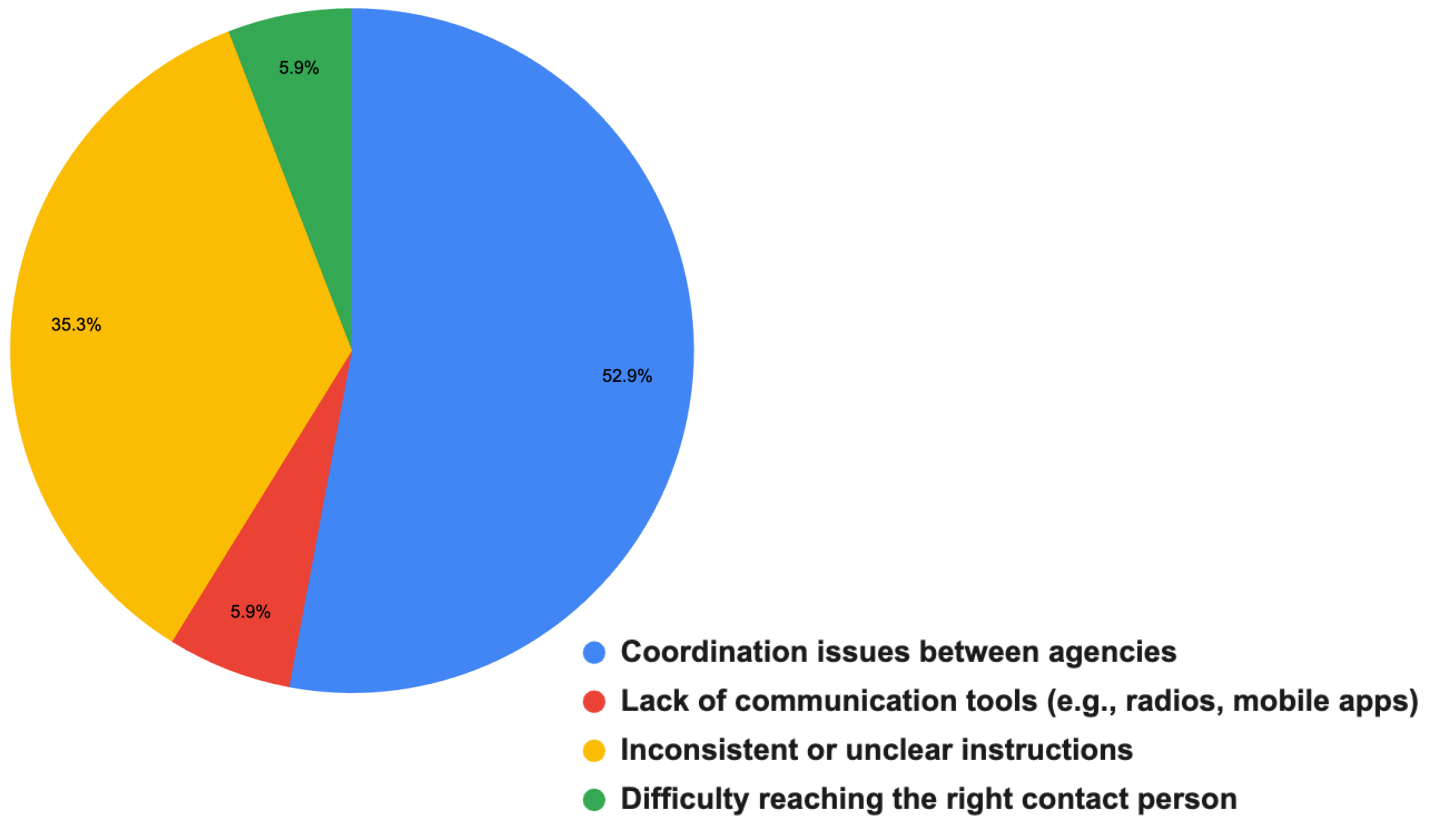


I received clear and effective instructions from animal services during the evacuation.

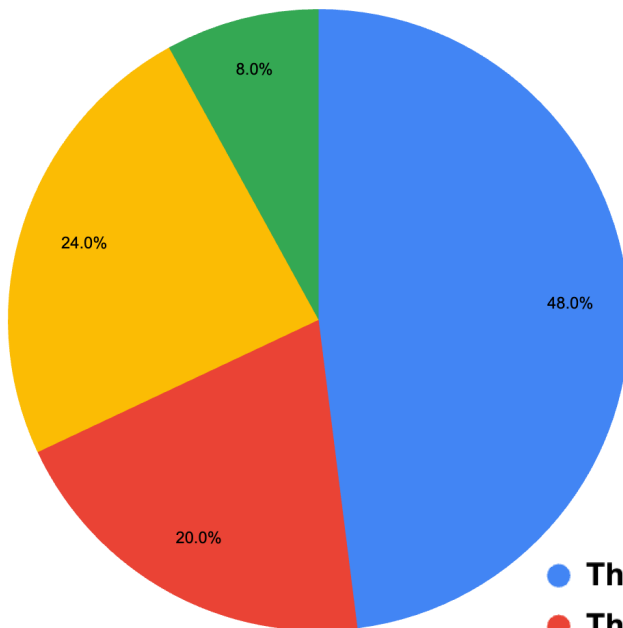
1 Strongly Disagree | 5 Strongly Agree



What challenges did you encounter due to gaps in communications between agencies during the response?



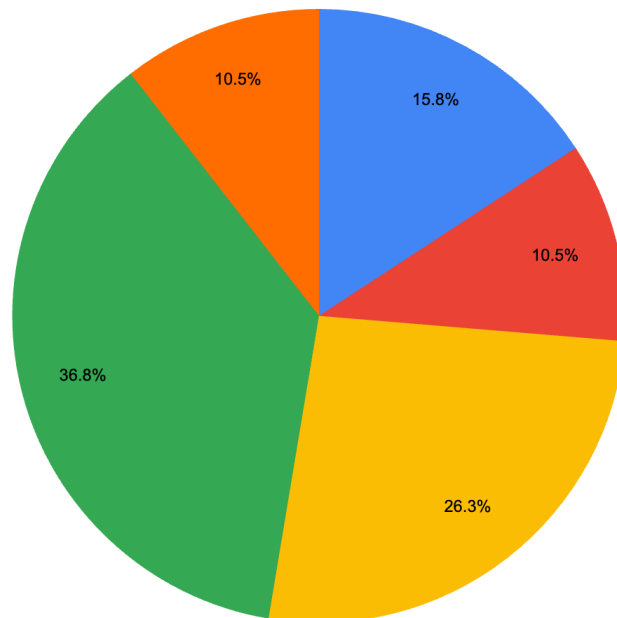
How would you describe the coordination of duties between agencies?



- There was some understanding, but gaps existed.
- There wasn't a shared understanding of duties.
- I'm not sure
- There was a clear and shared understanding of duties.

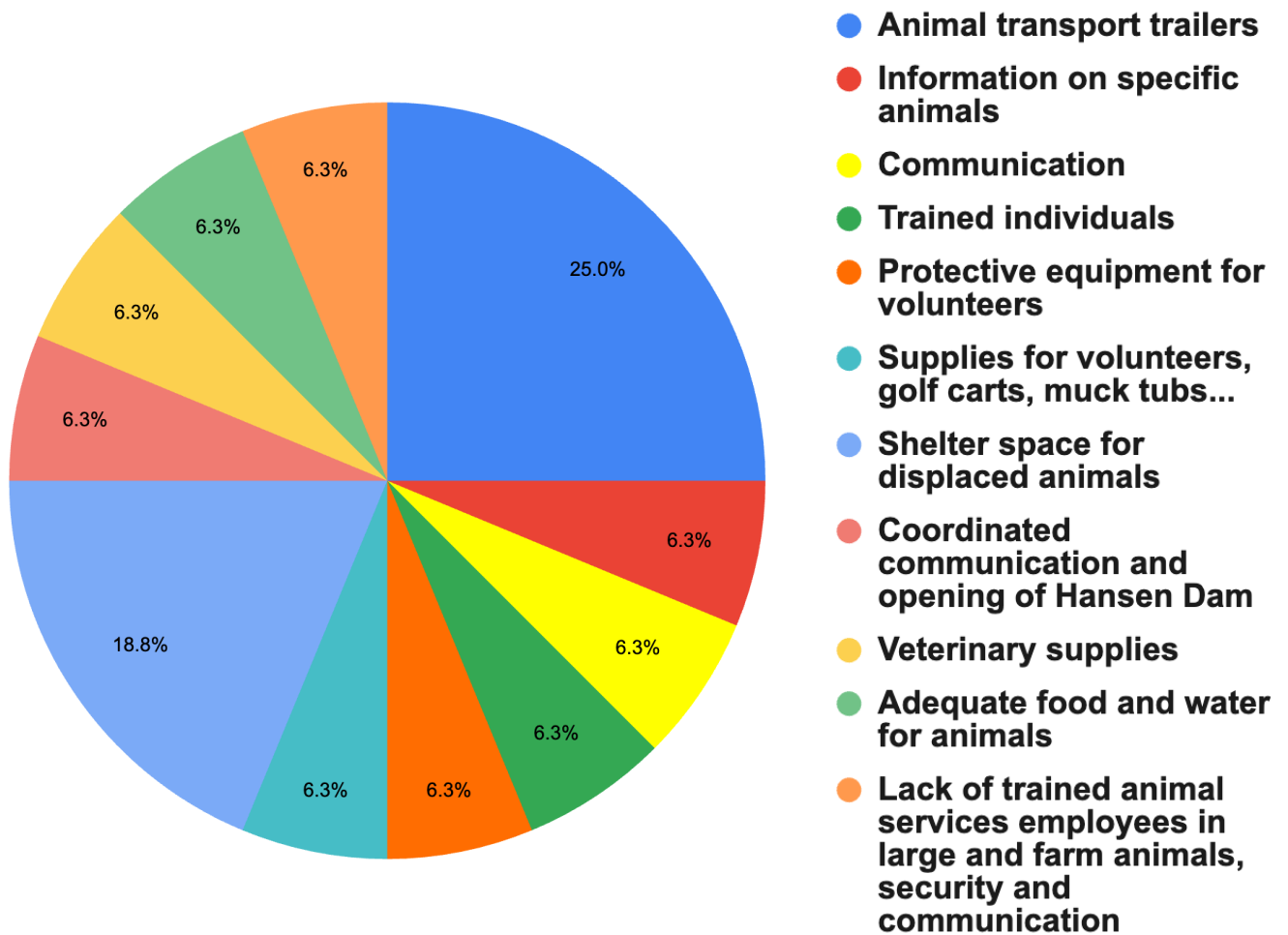
I had access to all necessary resources (trailers, food, water, medical supplies, etc.) during the evacuation.

1 Strongly Disagree | 5 Strongly Agree



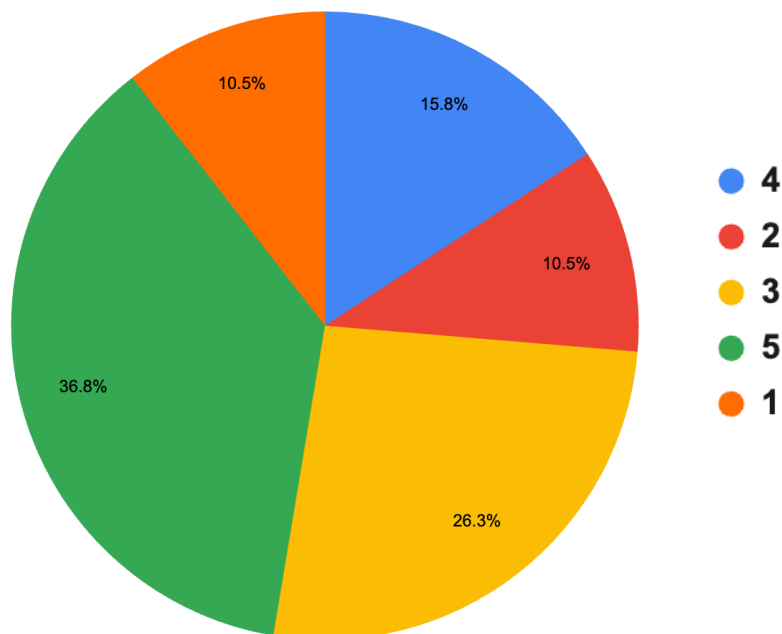
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What resources did you find lacking or difficult to access during the evacuation?

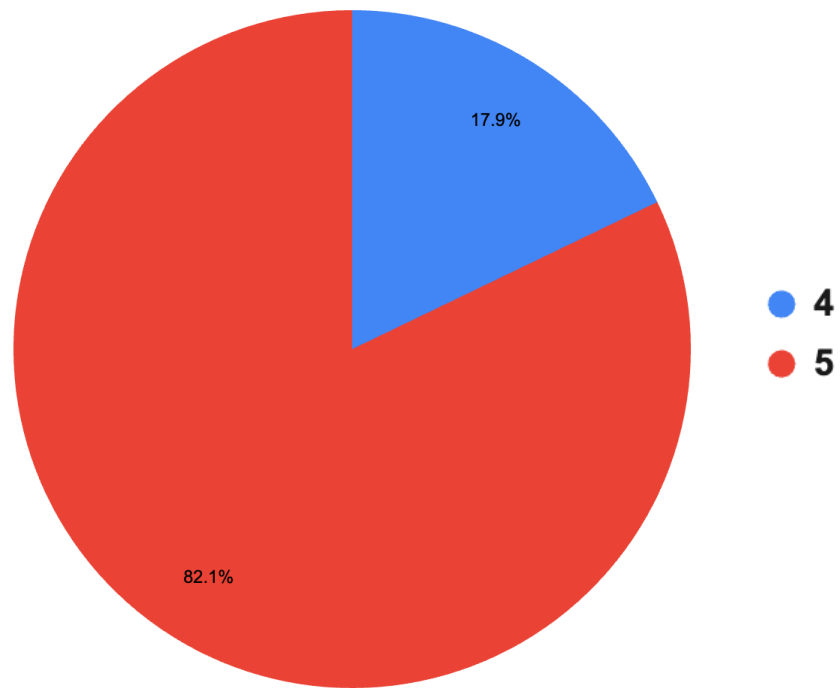


I had access to all necessary resources (trailers, food, water, medical supplies, etc.) during the evacuation.

1 Strongly Disagree | 5 Strongly Agree



I would be willing to volunteer in future evacuations.



Would you be willing to participate in future training and preparedness activities?

