

June 25, 2010

## Hundreds of Cats Rescued from Pennsylvania Sanctuary

During the early hours of June 24, members of the ASPCA's [Field Investigations and Response Team](#) assisted the Elk County Humane Society of St. Mary's, PA, in the rescue of 387 cats from a sanctuary known as the Animal Friends of Elk and Cameron Counties. More than 50 first responders, including staff and volunteers from the American Humane Association, which also provided sheltering services, and PetSmart Charities, which provided much-needed supplies, assisted in the raid.



*Joel Lopez, a member of the ASPCA Field Investigation and Response Team, checks in on one of the rescued cats.*

The cats—including numerous kittens—were found living in deplorable, overcrowded conditions on the first floor of a two-story commercial building about 120 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. The investigation was set into motion after complaints about the facility were received by the Elk County Humane Society, which in turn contacted the ASPCA for assistance.

According to Dr. Melinda Merck, ASPCA Senior Director of Veterinary Forensics, the cats are suffering from a host of ailments, including upper respiratory and eye infections and Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV). In addition, many cats are expected to test positive for the Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)—a highly transmittable disease that weakens the immune system and makes cats susceptible to secondary infections. Several of the cats were found in critical condition.



*One of the youngest rescues receives a medical check-up on site.*

"The overcrowding and unsanitary environment coupled with the stress of coping with untreated illnesses, has resulted in severe conditions for many of these cats," says Dr. Merck. "Every effort is being made to treat them and make them comfortable, and most appear to be friendly and well-socialized."

The cats were placed into the custody of the Elk County Humane Society and transported to an emergency shelter set up in a nearby location. Once there, a team of veterinarians conducted exams on each animal and triaged any immediate needs. The veterinary team led by the ASPCA's Dr. Merck, included Dr. Jason Byrd, Associate Director of the Center for Forensic Medicine at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Dr. Julie Levy, also with the University of Florida, veterinary students from the University of Pennsylvania led by Dr. Michael Moyer and veterinary technicians from the ASPCA.

To aid ASPCA investigators in the collection and management of forensic evidence, the [Mobile Animal Crime Scene Investigation \(CSI\) Unit](#) was deployed to the site. The ASPCA's new custom-designed animal transport trailer, mobile command truck and equipment trailer were also on hand.

"We are grateful to be in a position to provide resources and assistance in this overwhelming situation," says Tim Rickey, ASPCA's Senior Director of Field Investigation and Response. "Right now, our primary concern is to get these animals the care and treatment they so desperately need."