

USU Vet Student Reaches Out to Help Community Hit By Wildfires

Aubree Thomas

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The devastating wildfires that occurred in Northern California in October hit home for Sarah Beard, a California native and second-year student in the Utah State University School of Veterinary Medicine. Beard's hometown of Healdsburg was surrounded by two deadly fires. She wanted to find a way to help her community, but the rigorous schedule of vet school and being over 12 hours away from home posed a unique challenge.

"I wanted to go home and help, but you can't just leave vet school," Beard said. "My parents were doing what they could and had cleaned up the entire yard. My dad stayed home from work to spray down the roofs and my brother came home from college at San Luis Obispo. They said you could go outside and see the flames from the house. It was scary."

Beard spent her limited free time checking for up-to-date information on the spreading wildfires. While looking through social media, she saw some questionable advice

relating to smoke inhalation in pets that didn't line up with what she had learned in school. Beard recognized an important opportunity to get involved.

"There were plenty of tips for humans when it came to smoke inhalation, but not for pets," Beard said. "I just had the thought, 'Hey, that's something that I could do from here to try to serve and feel like I was helping out.'"

With the help of books and research papers, Beard created a flier to share information about recognizing and treating smoke inhalation and burns in pets. She even consulted her professors, Drs. Tom Baldwin, Briedi Gillespie and Johanna Rigas, to make sure the information she was sharing was correct.

"Mainly I was trying to get out good, correct information about smoke inhalation in dogs, cats and horses," Beard said. "It included signs to look for and when you should go to the vet. I tried to keep it simple, straightforward and easy to understand."

Beard sent her flier via Facebook to several places, including city offices, humane societies and veterinary hospitals and clinics in the affected area. While she doesn't know exactly how many people saw the flier, Beard said it was exciting to see her own work spread across social media.

Beard said veterinarians, both future and practicing, play an important role when it comes to disseminating correct information during a crisis situation, and hoped she was able to help pet owners and their animals.

"The most rewarding part was feeling like I had done something to help and make a difference," Beard said. "I hope it helped people and encouraged pet owners to take their animal to the vet if they recognized something was wrong. I hope their pets were better cared for if they saw the information and acted upon it because it was correct, not bad, information."

Writer: Aubree Thomas aubree.thomas@usu.edu