

AHA'S ANIMAL PLANET RESCUE AIDES RECOVERY EFFORTS ON STATEN ISLAND

As the tons of wreckage were hauled from the World Trade Center to the landfill on Staten Island, Rescue International was called in by the New York Police Department to coordinate canine operations. These operations were designed to have canine search and rescue teams carefully explore the rubble for human remains as well as evidence.

In order to help them care for the dogs under their supervision, Rescue International called upon the American Humane Association and Animal Planet Rescue. AHA arrived on Staten Island on September 25, and immediately set up camp at the canine compound at the landfill. "Our mission at the compound was to help shelter and care for the recovery dogs," says AHA's Ben Drotar, who acted as the Animal Planet Rescue on-site commander. "We supplied them with anything we had at our disposal – our veterinary clinic on the truck, our kennels, rescue equipment, food, water – anything that would help them with their operations."

Canine teams working the site were assigned 12-hour shifts, in teams of two. While helping veterinarians who were providing exams as well as decontamination for the service dogs, AHA staff also helped to track rescue teams and their efforts at the landfill. "When we got there, they had a pretty primitive sign-up sheet," recalls Drotar. "We started to gather the information they had and collect it in a manner that would better serve the rescue teams."

Canine recovery efforts were called off at the landfill on September 29. After testing the area where the dogs were closely working, the Environmental Protection Agency found potentially harmful amounts of asbestos. The decision to call off the efforts was also made to help speed up the recovery efforts directly relating to the rubble of the two World Trade Center towers.

In the five days that AHA and Animal Planet Rescue were at the landfill, over 50 dogs were cared for. "I think it was important that we helped out in any way we could," states Lynn Anderson, vice president of AHA's animal protection services. "Amidst all the chaos, we saw a lot of teamwork and support. We were proud that we provided for the dogs and their handlers who were performing the challenging task of searching through the rubble."



Dr. Lorna Lanman examines a search and rescue dog.



Handler Ortego Sergio and his search and rescue Bull Terrier "Sage" at the Staten Island landfill.