Tornado shelters face dilemma with pet lovers

Jerry Starr is pictured with Tobi, his four-year-old 4th toy-yorkie-mix dog at a park in Del City, Okla., Thursday. Starr was not allowed to take the dog into a shelter during the May 20, 2013, tornado and opted to stay outside the shelter in his car with his dog. AP photo/Sue Ogrocki

By KIM TAYLOR
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Jerry Starr thought he was taking the safe route when he left his home in the path of a howling tornado last May and headed for a local park. But when he arrived, a police officer told him that the only way they could allow him to ride out the storm was to stay in his car.

Starr said "I'm not going to live without my dog," and then drove to the next designated shelter, a high school gymnasium. There, he and others were told they could bring their pets into the shelter, but they would have to stay in their cages.

Starr, who has a disability that makes it difficult for him to walk, said he was not willing to leave his dog, Tobi, in the car. So he drove to a third shelter, a church, and was told he could bring Tobi inside.

"I'm like, 'Look, I'm not going to leave my dog,'" Starr said. "It's not like it's a cat. It's not like it's a bird. It's a dog. It's going to stay with me."

Starr's experience during the May 20, 2013, tornado, which killed 24 people and caused billions of dollars in damage, highlights a problem that has emerged in the wake of other recent storms, including the deadly tornadoes that struck Moore in 2013, the second-highest total in the nation, killing 35 people and destroying thousands of homes. Many of the shelters were in cars, homes or manufactured buildings. A few state-run shelters have begun to allow pets to return to help eligible homeowners (rated families) "safe rooms" or above or below ground shelters.

"One of the most common injuries that people may sustain during tornadoes, storms or straightline winds is animal bites, and so it's very important to take shelter," said Kirk Cole, spokeswoman for the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management.

But while the number of tornado shelters has increased in the storm-prone east of Oklahoma City, which is the state's most populous region, only a fraction of households have one.

At city council and campus subdivision meetings this spring, officials reviewing local emergency plans are also debating the implications of housing animals there.

"People are so attached to [their pets]," said Dr. Kathy Milani, president and Reese Rollard, director of Security at Oklahoma City's Integris Health, which operates hospitals and clinics from surrounding neighborhoods come, when [their] closely approach.

Milani said the hospital has no plans to relocate to help eligible homeowners (rated families)" safe rooms" or above or below ground shelters.

"One of the most common injuries

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2 men drop their federal lawsuit over Kansas voter ID law

In this photo from Aug. 5, 2011, Kobach speaks to reporters during an Associated Press interview in Topeka. Kobach is the architect of a state law requiring voters to show proof of identification at the polls. AP photo/Orlin Wagner

By JOHN HANNA
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA — Two elderly northeast Kansas men have dropped a lawsuit challenging a state law requiring voters to show photo identification at the polls, with a federal judge set to hear arguments in the case.

Attorney Dan Lemaigre told Thursday that Arthur Jury and Charles Hammer asked to have the case dismissed because they have concluded they will be able to vote in the elections. Also, he said, they feared requests for personal information was intrusive.

Jury, 86, lives in Overbrook, a small town in Kansas City, and Hammer, 80, lives in a retirement home in Overbrook, about 25 miles southeast of Topeka. They sued Secretary of State Kris Kobach, the Republican who championed the law requiring voters to present photo ID here after Osage County officials refused to count their votes in the November 2012.

The two men couldn't produce a valid photo ID

Their litigation said the requirement is "a pernicious attack" on the voting rights of Kansans who, like them, don't have cars or easy access to the Internet to obtain a birth certificate. They argued that the state's equal protection under the law had been violated.

"There was no way we could get a fatally asleep," Lemaigre told The Associated Press.

Kobach said the two men would have had a difficult time prevailing. He noted that the state constitution gives the Legislature the power to set voting rules and that the people of a statewide right to vote, like in 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a legal challenge to a voter ID law in Indiana.

Kobach said he was in good shape both to keep the opposition to Kobach and change no elections. They had no more obstacles that they had couldn't overcome.

Lemaigre enacted the photo ID law at Kobach's urging, as well has his proposals to require new voters to provide proof of their U.S. citizenship to election officials. Kansas began requiring that starting in January 2013, and that proof-of-citizenship

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