

## Rabbits Evacuated During California Wildfires

**Rabbit owners turn to local small animal rescue for shelter.**

*By Angela Pham*

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Three bunnies sleeping at the Bunny Bunch Rescue.  
Photos Courtesy of Caroline Charland  
Two rabbits at the Bunny Bunch in hay.

As crackling wildfires blazed throughout Chino Hills, California, and forced evacuations throughout residential areas, pet owners had to act quickly to ensure their animals were also far from the reaches of the flames. Fortunately, for the small animal evacuees, a local safe haven designed just for them opened its doors to provide a smoke-free temporary home for the small animals and peace of mind for their owners.

The Bunny Bunch, a no-kill, nonprofit rabbit and other small animal rescue organization in the neighboring city of Chino, welcomed 10 rabbits to its building on Saturday, November 14, and one person — an 82-year-old woman who spent the night on a couch with her rabbit. With space to hold about 100 rabbits, the bunny-sitting and adoption facility was a prime place for bunnies to take refuge, featuring an indoor area with exercise pens and collapsible carriers for every rabbit if evacuation at the Bunny Bunch building became necessary.

Had the facility reached rabbit-capacity, Bunny Bunch owner Caroline Charland said a number of foster homes were ready with experienced volunteers who could take in more evacuating rabbits.

Charland noted the fires in Chino Hills were far enough away from the Bunny Bunch in Chino to keep the evacuated rabbits safe. Still, rabbit owners were anxious as they witnessed the ever-spreading wildfire, nicknamed "the Freeway Complex fire," which engulfed parts of Carbon Canyon and ate up thousands of acres of the Chino Hills State Park.

Charland stated the owners who rushed their rabbits into the Bunny Bunch for shelter were "scared stiff."

"Throughout the day, different people came, but it's so hard," said Charland, who founded the Bunny Bunch 26 years ago. "Even on TV, it didn't tell people where they could take [their] animals."

### Facing Future Emergencies

If such an emergency situation occurs again, Charland hopes to more effectively get the word out that her building is available for rabbits and other small animals in need of a temporary shelter.

"I'd like to have that information more readily available for people," Charland said. "Cities and counties can refer people to us for rabbits and other small animals as well, like guinea pigs, rats, hamsters, chinchillas."

But Charland stressed that owners must also be responsible for preparing for similar emergency situations.

"I tell everybody with a rabbit that they need to have a hard carrier and a soft towel, and have the carrier ready and be ready to leave," she said.

She especially cautions against owners who leave their homes for several days or weeks and contemplate leaving their rabbits behind. Letting a neighbor stop in and check on the rabbit every day is not a safe option, she said.

During the time of the fires, Charland was bunny-sitting for a rabbit brought in after its owners decided against leaving it in the house for a neighbor to check on during their absence. They made the right decision, she said.

"The couple lived right where the fire was, in Carbon Canyon," Charland said. "If they hadn't [taken their rabbit to a sitter] to be looked after 24 hours a day, and their house had caught fire, there would've been a good chance the rabbit could have died."

It's an important lesson to learn, she said.

"Sometimes you don't think about things like that," she said. "Even if you go away for a few days, if you're in a fire area and