

Animal Control Officer Basic Training Course Requirements and Procedures
Texas Department of State Health Services, Zoonosis Control
Effective 1-1-2023

Mandated Animal Control Officer (ACO) Basic Training

The following document pertains to entities outside of Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Zoonosis Control (ZC) seeking to meet standards and curricula as prescribed by Texas Health and Safety Code (TH&SC), Chapter 829, Animal Control Officer Training, and by DSHS in this document for ACO basic courses. It does not pertain to courses being conducted by DSHS ZC, as those are pre-approved through statute.

To be in compliance with TH&SC, Chapter 829, Animal Control Officer Training,* a person may not perform the duties of an animal control officer unless

(1) the person:

(A) completes a basic animal control course under this chapter not later than the first anniversary of the date the person assumes animal control duties; or

(B) completed a personnel training course on or before June 30, 2008, under Section 823.004 as it existed on that date; and

(2) the person completes 30 hours of continuing education under this chapter during each three-year period following:

(A) the date the person completes the basic animal control course; or

(B) June 30, 2008, if the person completed a personnel training course under Subdivision (1)(B).

This statute defines an animal control officer as a person who is employed, appointed, or otherwise engaged primarily to enforce laws relating to animal control; it does not include peace officers.

Per TH&SC Section 829.003(c), the course must be a minimum of 12 hours in length.

To satisfactorily complete a DSHS-approved ACO basic course, the participant must attend all sessions of the entire course and pass both parts (General and Legal) of the test.

Requirements for ACO Training Course Implementation

According to Section 829.003, the training course curricula for the basic course must include the following topics:

- (1) state laws governing animal control and protection and animal cruelty;
- (2) animal health and disease recognition, control, and prevention;
- (3) the humane care and treatment of animals;
- (4) standards for care and control of animals in an animal shelter;
- (5) standards and procedures for the transportation of animals;
- (6) principles and procedures for capturing and handling stray domestic animals and wildlife, including principles and procedures to be followed with respect to an instrument used specifically for deterring the bite of an animal;
- (7) first aid for injured animals;
- (8) the documentation of animal cruelty evidence and courtroom procedures;
- (9) animal shelter operations and administration;
- (10) spaying and neutering, microchipping, and adoption;
- (11) communications and public relations; and
- (12) state and federal laws for possession of controlled substances and other medications; and
- (13) any other topics pertinent to animal control and animal shelter personnel.

Please note that it is the course sponsor's responsibility to be aware of law amendments and ensure that, in presentations referencing a law(s), the most recent version of the law(s) is being presented. Links to many of the laws pertinent to animal control can be accessed at <http://www.dshs.texas.gov/idcu/health/zoonosis/laws/rules/> (all the Texas statutes are located at <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/> and all the Texas Administrative Codes are located at <https://www.sos.texas.gov/tac/index.shtml>).

Basic training courses must cover all the mandated topics listed in TH&SC Section 829.003 and sponsors must adhere to standards and curricula presented in Chapter 829 and by DSHS in this document. **Prospective basic course sponsors not approved by DSHS prior to January 1, 2023, must also submit an application to DSHS for approval prior to conducting their first course.**

To satisfactorily complete a course, the participant must pass both parts of a test prepared by the sponsor; **a certificate is not to be issued until the participant successfully completes the course, which includes passing the test and attending all sessions of the entire course.** If the participant does not pass the test, they must re-take the course and test. It is the sponsor's responsibility to retain attendance rosters and test results.** Additionally, course sponsors need to inform participants that any participants who fail either part of the test will need to re-take a basic course to be eligible to re-test. Do not allow students to grade their own tests or tests of other students.

The required components of the test are:

- The test must consist of at least two parts: General [covers topics 2-11 in TH&SC Section 829.003(a)] and Legal [covers topics 1, 8, and 12 in TH&SC Section 829.003(a)]. The DSHS *Animal Control Officer Training Manual* covers all the mandated topics and should serve as a reference for developing questions; however, sponsors may, if they so desire, include questions on local ordinances (in the Legal part of the test) and animal control issues (in the General part of the test) if relevant for their target population of students.
- The test questions need to be designed to demonstrate that the student has applicable knowledge of all the mandated course topics in TH&SC Section 829.003(a).
- At least the following Texas state laws need to be covered in the Legal part of the test: TH&SC Chapters 821, 822, 823, 826, 828, 829, and Section 481.111; associated Texas Administrative Codes (TAC) for Chapters 821, 822, 826, and 828; and Penal Code Sections 42.09, 42.092, 42.10. and 42.105. Emphasis should be placed on questions pertaining to Chapter 826 (Rabies Control Act) and its associated TAC (Rabies Control and Eradication).
- A closed-book format must be implemented during the test (i.e. no open books, no access to internet, no use of phones or computers, etc.).
- Each part of the test (General and Legal) must have a minimum of 50 multiple choice questions.
- The student must achieve a minimum score of 70% on each part of the test (General and Legal) to pass the test.
- If the sponsor designs the test with the minimum 50 questions per part (General and Legal), at least 40 of the questions on each part need to be related to the numbered topics in the statute (refer to previous bullets) and, again, the student needs to score at least 70% on each part. If the sponsor opts to add more questions, at least 80% of the questions on each part (General and Legal) need to relate to the listed topics in TH&SC, Section 829.003(a), and the student still needs to score at least 70% on each part.

The course sponsor should advise students prior to the course of the availability of the DSHS *Animal Control Officer Training Manual* and the importance of being familiar with and knowledgeable of its contents -

<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/IDCU/health/zoonosis/education/training/aco/Manual.aspx>

It is the basic course sponsors' responsibility to provide certificates of completion to participants; the certificate must contain, at minimum: the participant's name; that it is an Animal Control Officer Basic Training; the length of the course in hours; a statement that the course sponsor was approved by the Texas Department of State Health Services; the course date and location ("virtual" or "online" may be substituted as applicable); and the sponsor's name and contact information. Failure to include the required information on a certificate of completion will result in the course sponsor issuing corrected certificates at their own expense. If the test date is different from the course completion date, basic course certificates need to also include the date that the participant satisfactorily passed the test along with the following statement: "The exam date will be used as the official course completion date for meeting training requirements per Chapter 829 of the Texas Health and Safety Code." **It is the participants' responsibility to retain the course certificate as proof of their training.**

If an approved course sponsor has a student who tests with another course sponsor, it is the responsibility of the sponsor that conducted the course to not issue a certificate of satisfactory completion until the course sponsor that conducted the test verifies that the student passed both parts of the test.

If a participant who does not pass the test needs proof of attendance, a letter may be issued (since they cannot be issued a certificate) stating that the participant attended ___ hours of ACO Basic Training but did not satisfactorily complete the exam.

The ACO basic course is distinct from ACO CE courses; the basic course cannot be used to acquire CEs.

Course sponsors must include the following statement in a legible format and visible location on course material:

"If a participant wants to provide feedback on this course and/or its sponsor, the participant can mail comments to the Texas Department of State Health Services, Training Course Coordinator, Zoonosis Control, MC 1956, P.O. Box 149347, Austin, Texas, 78714-9347 or email them to The.Vet@dshs.texas.gov."

Requirements for ACO Basic Training Course Instructors

Prospective basic course sponsors not approved by DSHS prior to January 1, 2023, must provide DSHS with a document or brief bio(s) indicating each instructor's relevant education, work, and training backgrounds, including dates. Each instructor at a basic course must:

- 1) have satisfactorily completed a DSHS or DSHS-approved ACO basic training course and have at least 2 years full-time experience in animal control, animal shelter, and/or humane society work; or
- 2) have satisfactorily completed a DSHS ACO Advanced and/or Administrative training course prior to June 30, 2008; or
- 3) be a licensed veterinarian; or
- 4) be a bar-qualified lawyer; or

- 5) be a Licensed Veterinary Technician, Certified Veterinary Technician, Certified Veterinary Assistant, and/or have 3 years experience working as a veterinary technician; or
- 6) have an associate or higher college degree in a science- or education-related field from an accredited institution of post-high school education; or
- 7) have a college degree in teaching from an accredited institution of post-high school education and/or at least 3 years teaching experience for high school level or above; or
- 8) be a licensed or certified instructor through the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) (formerly the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education or TCLEOSE); or
- 9) have at least 3 years full-time experience in law enforcement; or
- 10) have at least 3 years full-time experience in animal control, animal shelter, and/or humane society work: or
- 11) have at least 3 years experience in city, county, state, and/or federal public health work.

Instructors subject to Ch. 829 who teach a CE course or provide a presentation at a basic course may apply that instruction time toward their Ch. 829 CE training requirement. However, they may only apply a maximum of 15 CE hours per 3-year CE period through either of these means, separate or combined:

- The topic must be different for each CE course taught for which they are applying toward CE credit per 3-year CE period. This does not apply to presenting at basic courses.
- For presentations at basic courses only, the same topic can be presented a maximum of 6 times per 3-year CE period for credit.

Virtual Courses

Virtual ACO Basic Training Courses: Course sponsors of virtual basic courses need to meet the requirements already described for in-person courses. That includes being responsible for meeting all the course requirements per TH&SC, Ch. 829:

- All topics listed in TH&SC Section 829.003(a) must be covered.
- An instructor should be reasonably qualified to instruct on his/her assigned topic.
- The course must be at least 12 hours in length per TH&SC Section 829.003(c).
- Attendance at all sessions of the course is required per TH&SC Section 829.003(b)(3). Therefore, verification and documentation of each participant's attendance **at every topic session** must be possible. A participant simply registering for a course or doing an initial check in does not suffice to meet this requirement. The course sponsor must use a virtual program that allows them to visually and/or electronically monitor each participant's actual attendance at each session. In the application for course approval, the course sponsor needs to describe what process will be used to verify each participant's attendance at every topic session.
- Students must satisfactorily pass a test that meets the criteria previously described.

Application for Approval of ACO Basic Training Course Sponsors and Curricula

Prospective basic course sponsors not approved by DSHS prior to January 1, 2023, must submit an application to DSHS for approval prior to conducting their first course. Application materials can be sent to The.Vet@dshs.texas.gov.

To ensure a response from DSHS prior to conducting the course, course sponsors should apply for approval at least 8 weeks prior to the course date. Sponsors must submit the duration (number of actual classroom hours not including time spent for lunch, breaks, or testing); a course agenda/outline; the name and credentials of the instructor(s); and a course contact name, email address, phone number, plus fax number, if available, to

Texas Department of State Health Services
Training Course Coordinator
Zoonosis Control, MC 1956
P.O. Box 149347
Austin, Texas 78714-9347
or
The.Vet@dshs.texas.gov

Within 6 weeks, DSHS will respond as to whether the course has been approved and/or to inform the sponsor of additional documentation or information that must be provided to DSHS in order to have the course approved.

Once a sponsor has been approved, subsequent offerings of the identical course utilizing the same instructors may be given without requesting additional approvals. **However, pre-approval must be sought for changes in the length of the course or instructor(s).** If the length of the course changes, the sponsor must contact DSHS with the reason for this modification; if the instructor(s) changes, the sponsor must submit a bio(s) for approval.

If a basic course sponsor wants a course posted at <http://www.dshs.texas.gov/idcu/health/zoonosis/education/training/nonaco/> (which is part of the DSHS website), they must submit a written request and provide the following required information for posting on the internet: date, type (basic), title, location, contact name, contact's email address, and contact's phone number. To expedite posting, provide this information in the order presented here.

Course sponsors who are interested in obtaining Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) credits for their participants should contact TCOLE at 512-936-7700.

Training Waivers Issued by the Office of the Governor*

Background: On May 14, 2020, the Office of the Governor issued a waiver pertaining to the temporary suspension of Chapter 829 training requirements for animal control officers (ACOs) and a waiver pertaining to the temporary suspension of Chapter 821 (and associated Texas

Administrative Code) training requirements for euthanasia technicians as a result of the March 13, 2020, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) disaster declaration. Extensions to these waivers were granted on August 10, 2020, and would be in effect until terminated by the Office of the Governor or until the March 13, 2020, disaster declaration was lifted or expired.

Update – below is the notice issued on July 19, 2021, pertaining to the withdrawal/termination of training waivers from the Office of the Governor:

- **Effective 12:01 AM on September 1, 2021 withdrawal of waivers (*These are the animal control officer and euthanasia technician trainings*)**
 - **25 TAC § 169.84(g), extension approved on August 10, 2020**
 - **Texas Health and Safety Code § 821.055(a) and (d), extension approved on August 10, 2020**
 - **Texas Health and Safety Code § 829.002(1)(A) and (2)(A), extension approved on August 10, 2020**
 - **Texas Health and Safety Code § 829.004(a) and (b), extension approved on August 10, 2020**

*** For information on temporary training policy modifications and suspensions/waivers due to COVID-19, go to**

<https://dshs.texas.gov/IDCU/health/zoonosis/education/training/ACO.aspx>

<https://dshs.texas.gov/IDCU/health/zoonosis/animal/control/shelters/Euthanasia.aspx>

<https://dshs.texas.gov/IDCU/health/zoonosis/education/training/ACO-Courses-By-Outside-Sources.aspx>

** The advised retention period for ACO basic and continuing education course exam results and attendance rosters is a minimum of 3 years beyond the end of the calendar year in which the course was given; the results can be retained either in hard copy or database format.

Disclaimer: During any disaster declaration, it is the responsibility of the course sponsor to determine if there are any applicable restrictions in place to which they must adhere, including those associated with an emergency declaration(s) or a local order condition(s).

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