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Shelter Facilities

In general, animal shelters house and care for stray, homeless, abandoned (deserted), or unwanted animals.

Impoundment facilities are shelters in which animals are collected or confined by a government entity (such as the city or county) or government contractor because of a state law or local ordinance. Impoundment is the taking or seizing of an animal by an animal control officer (ACO), peace officer, or any person appointed by the local government. A humane society is an impoundment facility if it contracts with a city or county to hold animals that ACOs apprehend. Rabies quarantine facilities are shelters that are licensed by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to quarantine dogs and cats for the rabies observation period. A quarantine facility must be **inspected yearly** by DSHS.

Laws Regulating Animal Shelters

Chapter 823 (Texas Health and Safety Code) requires all shelters in **counties with a population of 75,000 or greater** to employ a veterinarian **once a year** to inspect the shelter.

Animal shelters in counties with a population greater than 75,000 and all quarantine and impoundment facilities regardless of county population must meet the minimum standards for housing and care listed in Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Rabies Control and Eradication, Section 169.26 (rules for Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 826, Rabies Control Act). These rules also require that all plans to build a rabies quarantine facility be reviewed by the DSHS.

Impoundment Period

City and county governments write ordinances or laws that decide how many days a stray animal will be held after it is captured. **Animals are usually held for a minimum of 3 working days to give owners a chance to claim their lost pets.** At the end of the impoundment period, the animals become the property of the shelter. The local ordinances should contain some provision for immediate euthanasia of extremely sick or injured animals. Many cities and counties have a policy of keeping licensed pets longer than the minimum impoundment period. This encourages residents to participate in the licensing program.

Shelter Standards for Care and Control

Animal shelters may be simple or elaborate, but they all should meet minimum standards (requirements) and provide for the safety and well-being of the animals. The following topics describe some of the ways to meet minimum standards for animal shelters:

Structural Strength

Facilities must have a sound structure and be in good condition. They must be able to contain the animals, protect them from injury, and prevent transmission of diseases. Building surfaces must not absorb moisture and must be easy to sanitize.

Floors

Floors need to be made of durable, moisture-resistant material. For example, smooth, sealed cement floors are easy to clean and will not absorb moisture and odors. Additionally, floors which are properly sloped (slanted) to the drain will help prevent standing water.

Waste Disposal

A shelter must have a way to remove and dispose of animal wastes, such as urine and feces. Sanitary sewers, septic tank systems, or garbage plans are all possible options. A mechanism must also be in place for disposing of food wastes, bedding, dead animals, and debris. Disposal must be conducted in a way that keeps vermin, odors, and the spread of disease to a minimum.

Water, Lighting, and Electricity

Adequate fresh, clean drinking water must be available. Sufficient lighting is needed to properly clean a shelter and observe the animals; a reliable source of electricity will be important in achieving this and other requirements.

Heating, Ventilation, and Cooling

Shelters must be ventilated and able to provide supplementary heating and cooling. When the surrounding temperature falls below 50^0F (10^0C), animals must be provided with additional heat or dry bedding. If the temperature rises above 85^0F (29.5^0C) in indoor facilities, fans or air conditioning must be provided. Ventilation must be sufficient to keep drafts, odors, and moisture buildup to a minimum.

Enclosures and Space Requirements

Comfortable and safe enclosures for the animals, such as cages and runs, are a requirement. Each animal must have space (without touching the top of the enclosure) to turn, stand, sit, stretch, move its head, and lie in a comfortable position with limbs extended. Each animal must also be able to be in a comfortable position for eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating. Enclosures must allow the animal to stay dry and clean and be protected from injury and illness. The surfaces of the enclosures must not absorb moisture and must be easy to sanitize. Animals kept in enclosures must be protected from excessive lighting. The animal must also have convenient access to food and water.

Washrooms and Sinks

Provide washrooms and sinks for employees to wash themselves. Practicing proper hygiene techniques, such as hand washing, helps prevent the spread of disease.

Storage

Store food and bedding where they are protected against vermin. If perishable food is used, refrigeration is required.

Weather Conditions

Provide shade to protect the animal from the direct rays of the sun and direct effects of wind. Provide protection that enables the animal to stay dry during rain, snow, and other precipitation.

Shelter Operations and Administration

Even the nicest facility can be an unacceptable one if it is not operated and maintained properly. The following information contains concepts of shelter management.

Policies and Procedures

Written policies and procedures provide standards and give instructions for every part of a shelter's operations. A rabies quarantine facility must have standard operating procedures (SOP) on quarantine practices readily available to employees.

Unloading Animals

A good practice is to unload animals in an **enclosed** drive-in bay or fenced area to prevent their escape. Take special care when unloading animals to be quarantined.

Animal Surrender

Before accepting an animal being surrendered by someone, it would be advisable to obtain a signed release from the person to certify that he/she is the owner of the animal or that it is a stray. The person should also confirm that, to his/her knowledge, the animal has not bitten or scratched anyone within the last 10 days. Additionally, the person should also acknowledge that he/she realizes that there is a strong possibility that the animal will be euthanatized.

Animal Identification

Identify every animal in the shelter. Complete an impoundment card and assign an impoundment number for each animal. Keep a record on each animal that includes, at a minimum, the physical description of the animal, impoundment date, disposition date, and method of disposition.

Separation of Animals

Separate animals and do not put too many animals in one cage (try to have only one animal per cage). Litters can be kept together and can be kept with the mother; young animals can be kept together (healthy puppies can be kept together and healthy kittens can be kept together). When space is a problem, house animals by species, sex, and size. Always separate animals that are sick, injured, aggressive, or under rabies quarantine from other animals.

Food Storage

It is recommended that if sacks of food are stacked, they do not touch the floor or walls. It would be advisable to store food sacks on pallets or shelves with at least 12 inches between the floor and the first level. Storing food in metal or plastic barrels is better than keeping it in sacks. Rotate the food supply so that the older food is used before the newer food.

Remember: first in – first out.

Donated food can be a large savings to a shelter's budget. Examine sacks and cans of donated food for damage and insects. Store opened bags of food in containers with lids that fit tight to protect the food from moisture, insects, and rodents.

Sanitation

Dispose of waste and trash properly to prevent odor and disease problems. Clean cages as often as necessary and remove all waste so the animals do not have contact with it. Clean the shelter at least once daily to control and reduce odors and disease hazards.

Pest Control

Create and maintain a regular program for the control of ants, flies, roaches, fleas, ticks, and other pests. Avoid pest problems by using good construction methods and by proper cleaning, feeding, and storage procedures. Keep the facility free of any signs of vermin infestation.

Humane Care and Treatment

Always treat and handle impounded animals in a caring, humane manner. Observe animals at least twice daily for any evidence of illness or injury. Note any physical or behavioral changes on the animal's record.

Arrange for a veterinarian to provide help and give advice. The veterinarian will diagnose and may treat the sick and injured animals.

At those times when a veterinarian is not available, shelter employees must make decisions about an animal's health. Always document the animal's condition and get a second opinion. If possible, take a picture of the animal as proof of its state of health. Keep sick or injured animals quiet and isolated if they must be kept for a short time. **Never let an animal suffer.**

Water and Watering

The shelter needs a fresh, clean supply of water for the animals and for cleaning purposes. Clean water must be available to the animals at all times (or you must offer it to them at least twice a day for at least one hour at a time or as directed by a veterinarian).

You can give water to animals in several different kinds of containers. Stainless steel or plastic buckets for dogs and stainless steel or plastic bowls for cats are the most common methods. Domestic ferrets need access to water at all times provided in drinking bottles. Drinking bottles can also be used for other animals acclimated to their use. Check water containers often for the amount of water and the cleanliness of the water. Clean containers clean and sanitary.

Food and Food Preparation

Food for all animals must be wholesome and meet the normal daily requirements for the condition, size, and age of the animal. Food must also be free from contamination, nutritious, and appetizing.

Feed dogs and cats **at least once a day** or as directed by a veterinarian. They need to be fed the amount appropriate for their age and condition (for instance, you would feed puppies and kittens more often than adult dogs and cats). Dry dog and cat

food are the most common and acceptable foods for use. Animals must have easy access to their food. Provide every adult dog with its own food bowl to prevent fighting and ensure that each animal is fed. Make sure that each animal is able to eat the food that you give it.

Domestic ferrets need to have continuous access to food. All other animals must be fed appropriately as described on the packaging of a commercial, species-specific food or as directed by a veterinarian.

Provide food bowls that are strong, sanitary, and easy to clean. Stainless steel bowls with wide bottoms are best because the animal cannot overturn them easily. Self feeders for dry food can be used for animals acclimated to their use. If disposable receptacles are used, they need to be discarded after each feeding. Check the animal's food and throw it away if it becomes contaminated or spoiled.

Rabies Quarantine

Report potential rabies exposures to humans to the local rabies control authority (LRCA). A potential exposure includes any incident in which an animal has bitten a human or in which there is probable cause to believe that an animal has otherwise exposed a human to rabies. The LRCA decides if the animal will be quarantined or tested for rabies.

If the animal that potentially exposed a person to rabies is a dog, cat, or domestic ferret, it must be placed in quarantine until the end of the 10-day observation period or it must be euthanatized and tested for rabies. The 10-day observation period, which is 240 hours from the time of the potential exposure, applies only to dogs, cats, and domestic ferrets. Local ordinances may be more stringent and extend the observation period. During the observation period, the health status of the animal is

watched. It is advisable to not vaccinate animals against rabies during their observation period. However, animals may be treated for unrelated medical problems diagnosed by a veterinarian.

Quarantined animals must be separated and confined. They cannot have any contact with other animals or people. Quarantined animals must be separated by a solid partition from all other animals so there is no possibility of physical contact between them. The confinement chamber must be enclosed on all sides, including the top. Quarantine runs, cages, or rooms must have “Rabies Quarantine” signs posted.

The LRCA must approve the location where the animal is to be quarantined. A quarantine facility licensed by DSHS, a veterinary clinic, or the home of the animal owner (under certain conditions) are examples of possible locations. The LRCA can allow home confinement of dogs, cats, and domestic ferrets if all of the following requirements are met:

- secure facilities are available;
- the animal was vaccinated against rabies and the time that passed since the most recent vaccination has not exceeded the label recommendations for the vaccine. If an unvaccinated animal is not over 16 weeks of age, it may be allowed home confinement;
- the animal’s custodian must monitor the animal’s behavior and health status during the confinement and notify the LRCA if any change is noted;
- the LRCA or a licensed veterinarian can observe the animal at least on the first and last days of the home confinement; and
- the animal was not a stray (roaming with no physical restraint beyond the premises of the animal’s owner or keeper) at the time of the bite.

Remember: allowing the animal to be confined at home for rabies observation does not relieve the LRCA of the responsibility that the process will be properly enforced.

If the dog, cat, or domestic ferret is quarantined at your facility:

- have the animal observed closely at least twice a day for any signs of rabies (be sure to document these observations in writing);
- report any change in the animal's physical condition or behavior immediately to all involved parties; and
- have the animal euthanatized and its head submitted for rabies testing if a veterinarian determines that it is showing clinical signs of rabies.

Handling of quarantined animals must be conducted in a way that avoids contact of saliva from the animal with other animals or people.

If the animal is still alive and healthy at the end of the observation period, there could not have been any rabies virus in the animal's saliva at the time of the potential exposure. This means that the animal did not expose the person to rabies. Notify all people involved when an animal completes its observation period. Release it after all fees have been paid; have the release in writing and signed by both an agency employee and the owner. If the animal is not currently vaccinated against rabies, arrangements must be made to have it vaccinated.

Additional reference:

Association of Shelter Veterinarians, *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* at: http://www.sheltervet.org/about/shelter-standards/