

This Chapter Covers:

- ◆ Citations
- ◆ Professional Behavior
- ◆ Courtroom Procedures

Citations

Animal control officers (ACOs) should be given the authority to issue citations to citizens. A citation is an order to appear in court and answer to charges of violations.

Professional Behavior

You must be on your best professional behavior when involved in court cases. This begins with obtaining and organizing all the facts for your case. You must be sure that the case will be worth the court's time. If you make errors in your preparation, you may lose your case. Worse yet, the judge or prosecutor may think you are not a reliable ACO. You want to earn the judge's or prosecutor's respect every time you bring a case to court.

Courtroom Procedures

If you have never prepared for a court case, talk with your city or county attorney and with more experienced officers. Get their advice. Attend some of their court cases. Learn how they prepare the paperwork and review the cases.

Court Conduct (Basic)

The following statements are intended to provide guidance to help you feel more comfortable about giving testimony in court and to make your testimony more effective.

- Write down as much information as you can about the violation when it occurs.
- Write clearly so you and others can read your notes later. Remember that your notes may be subpoenaed, so keep them precise and accurate.
- Legally obtain evidence (videos, photographs, witnesses, repeat offender status, etc.).
- Know the state laws* and local ordinances that will help with your case.
- Review your notes and the evidence with the lawyer representing your side. Be certain that your lawyer knows both the good and bad points of your case.
- Visit with the judge before the case goes to court to review the importance of the animal control laws in your town or county.
- Arrive on time for the court hearing.
- Bring all necessary records and evidence for the hearing.
- Dress in a clean, neat uniform, and be personally well-groomed. Your physical appearance will make an impression upon the judge or jury.
- Be truthful with your testimony and the evidence you provide, even when it may hurt your case.

Court Conduct (Basic)

- Listen carefully to all questions and be certain that you understand a question before answering. Do not give more information than needed. Keep answers concise and, if possible, brief. Do not be afraid to say “I do not know.”
- Answer questions with certainty. Answers such as “I think so” or “I do not believe so” indicate to the judge or jury that you may not be sure of your own testimony.
- Remain objective and “in control.” You are there to present the facts. Do not become so personally involved that you become upset or lose your objectivity. Remember that the lawyer from the opposing side may try to make you lose your temper.
- Be polite and show respect for the court and the lawyers from both sides.
- Do not discuss the case with other persons during a recess.

If you do not win your case, review what happened and try to determine what went wrong. Talk with the judge to learn what you need to change and improve. You may find that the judge does not really understand animal control problems. The judge may be more interested in your cases if you provide him or her with more information. Let the judge know that you have a very important job protecting the health and safety of people and animals.

* Refer to these sites for an official copy of a state law for use in a court case:

Statutes - <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/>

Texas Administrative Codes - <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/tac/>