

## **HSUS Guidelines for Animal Shelter Policies**

An animal shelter has two main jobs—to be a safe haven for all animals in need and to be the nucleus of a community's animal care and control program. Its staff should provide quality care for all stray and relinquished animals temporarily in its care, making every effort to provide a safe, comfortable, and stress-free environment. The shelter should also be accessible and welcoming to the community.

### **Purpose**

An animal shelter's tasks should include the following: teaching humane principles in the community, preventing animal cruelty and suffering, and enforcing animal protection laws. Although an animal shelter may not undertake all of these tasks itself, it has an ethical, and often legal, responsibility to ensure that some person or organization in the community undertakes them.

### **General Policies**

If your shelter is a municipal animal care and control facility, the commissioners in charge must fully acquaint themselves with the community's animal problems and should consistently allocate adequate funding and resources for a humane and effective animal care and control program. A comprehensive animal control ordinance should be in place and adequately enforced.

If your shelter is a private facility (or a private facility with a government contract to perform animal care and control functions), all members of the board of directors must have a basic understanding of animal care and control issues. Board members should commit time and effort to help develop policies and plans that will help the animals, support the staff, and serve the community. Board members should remember that they are responsible to the dues-paying membership and should report the shelter's activities to the membership at regular intervals.

The policies below are minimum standards for any animal shelter. While a shelter is limited to its available resources, it should follow these policies closely if it is to be an asset to the animals and the community it serves:

- Accept every animal.
- Accept surrendered animals without charging a fee.
- Maintain a clean, comfortable, safe, and healthy environment for each animal.
- Hold stray animals for a minimum of five operating days, including Saturdays.
- Screen prospective adopters using established adoption standards.
- Use sodium pentobarbital administered by well-trained, compassionate individuals when euthanasia is necessary.
- Spay or neuter all animals at the time of adoption, or require adopters to get their animals sterilized soon after placement.

The public should consider the shelter a public service for both the animal and human members of the community. Shelter staff should strive to maintain a positive attitude and an inviting atmosphere to encourage the public to bring in stray and unwanted animals. If there are too many obstacles to surrendering animals, people are more likely to abandon them. Signs directing the public to your shelter's location should be clearly posted, and a map should be extensively publicized.

### **Daily Operations**

Your shelter should have written operational policies and standards to ensure that daily operations run as smoothly as possible.

### **Hours of Operation**

Your shelter should be open a minimum of five days per week for claiming or adopting animals, including at least one weekend day. It should be open until at least 7 p.m. at least one evening a week so it is accessible to people working typical business hours. The hours of operation should be clearly posted outside the shelter and made known throughout the community.

In addition, your shelter should make arrangements to receive and assist sick or injured animals twenty-four hours a day, and it should offer an emergency pick-up service, if possible.

### **Animal Care and Housing**

Your shelter should provide the most comfortable, stress-free environment possible for the animals in your care. Animals should have access to clean, fresh water at all times and be fed according to HSUS recommendations or those of a consulting veterinarian. Food and water bowls should be properly disinfected every day.

Cages and kennels should be commercially manufactured, in good condition, cleaned and disinfected daily, and free of sharp or broken edges. Dogs and cats must be housed separately, and the housing should reflect their different needs.

For more information on shelter operations, please see *HSUS Guidelines for the Operation of an Animal Shelter* in the HSI Electronic Library at [www.hsihsus.org](http://www.hsihsus.org).

### **Adoptions**

Your shelter should strive to place animals in loving, responsible, and permanent homes. Adoption fees for purebred or obedience-trained animals or for animals with distinguishing characteristics should be the same as those charged for other animals. In addition, adoption fees for cats and dogs should be identical.

For a complete discussion of companion animal adoptions, please see *HSUS Guidelines for Responsible Adoption Programs* in the HSI Electronic Library at [www.hsihsus.org](http://www.hsihsus.org).

## **Euthanasia**

Shelters must demonstrate a respect for quality of life and provide the most humane death possible for sick, injured, or unwanted animals. In order to be humane, a euthanasia method must result in painless, rapid unconsciousness followed by cardiac or respiratory arrest and, ultimately, death. The HSUS recommends the injection of sodium pentobarbital, prepared specifically for the euthanasia of companion animals. This method, when properly performed, has been found to be the most humane, safest, least stressful, and most professional choice.

Only staff who have been properly trained in euthanasia should perform it. Shelters also must follow federal and state guidelines regarding euthanasia methods and administration.

For more information on euthanasia, please see *HSUS General Statement Regarding Euthanasia Methods* in the HSI Electronic Library at [www.hsihsus.org](http://www.hsihsus.org).

## **Record Keeping**

Complete and accurate records are essential for the responsible, efficient, and legal operation of your animal shelter. A record should be prepared for every animal entering your shelter, giving a full description of the animal and any information about the animal's background that is available. These records should be numbered and filed so that all staff can easily retrieve them. An animal should have the same record or tag number throughout his or her stay at the shelter, and each animal must be clearly identified with a temporary collar and tag.

Accurate record keeping is also necessary for an effective lost-and-found program as well as for tracking animal control calls, cruelty complaints, and the disposition of the animals in the shelter's care. Several computer software programs for shelter management are available. Contact The HSUS's Animal Sheltering Issues staff for more information.

## **Programs**

Shelter activities should be based on the best interests of the animals and the community. The role of staff members is to provide humane care of the animals and to carry out the shelter's programs effectively. Staff members should provide commissioners or board members with information or assistance that will promote the development of responsible animal care and control programs.

## **Spay/Neuter Efforts**

It is imperative that shelters have a mandatory spay/neuter program for all adopted animals, preferably one that incorporates both sterilization at adoption and early-age spay/neuter. Shelters should make it a top priority to ensure that the animals they place for adoption do not contribute to companion animal overpopulation.

## **Cruelty Investigation**

Every community should have trained personnel to investigate animal cruelty issues and enforce animal protection laws. All calls and complaints must be handled in a professional, courteous, and timely manner. Personnel should be able to respond twenty-four hours a day in cases of emergency. If a shelter doesn't have an investigator, it should refer callers to the appropriate law enforcement agency in the area.

## **Humane Education**

Your shelter should make every effort to provide humane education for local residents, especially children. From sponsoring community-wide awareness campaigns to sending shelter staff into classrooms for presentations, your shelter can embrace a variety of strategies to teach responsible pet ownership and instill a humane ethic in all members of the community.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers can be an invaluable asset to your shelter's programs and its animals. However, don't expect volunteers to fill most staffing needs. All volunteers must be properly trained for the duties they are assigned and should be supervised at all times.

## **Management**

It is a binding obligation of shelter administrators to evaluate current procedures frequently; ensure that animals are properly cared for; and verify that employees are competent, compassionate, and properly trained.

## **Personnel**

Shelter employees should be regarded as the skilled professionals that they are and should be paid on that basis. All job positions and descriptions should include salaries and benefits that will attract competent people with good judgment who care about treating animals humanely. Written policies and procedures for employees are essential, not only for the orientation and training of new employees, but also to ensure continuity and efficiency within the shelter.

A comprehensive policies and procedures manual, explaining shelter policies and general job duties, should be made available to every staff member. The following is a suggested outline:

1. History, mission, purposes, and general policies (including euthanasia policies and other policies related to animals)
2. Organizational structure, job descriptions for all positions, policies for benefits and leave
3. Role of the board or other governing body
4. Procedures for office, kennel, and field services; security and safety procedures
5. Resources, including state and local animal laws and a list of other animal care and control agencies in the community

## **Training**

Shelter staff must be trained so they can effectively perform the following functions:

- Provide humane care and disposition of shelter animals.
- Protect the animals from disease and injury.

- Solve or refer all types of community animal problems to the proper person or agency.
- Deal with the public courteously, professionally, and effectively.

Shelter employees should be encouraged to attend out-of-house training sessions and be given opportunities to do so. An effort should be made to address problems associated with employee stress, including adoption- and euthanasia-related anxiety.

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Prepared by The HSUS's Animal Sheltering Issues staff.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) was founded in 1954 to promote the humane treatment of animals and to foster respect, understanding, and compassion for all creatures. Today its message of care and protection embraces not only the animal kingdom but also Earth and its environment. To achieve its goals, The HSUS works through legal, educational, legislative, and investigative means. The HSUS's efforts in the United States are facilitated by its nine regional offices; its worldwide outreach is supported by its global humane family of organizations.

The HSUS is not an umbrella organization for local humane societies, animal shelters, or other animal care and control agencies, nor does it have any legal or contractual relationships with such organizations. The HSUS publishes guidelines and recommendations for these organizations. For more information on shelter policies and procedures, please contact The HSUS's Animal Sheltering Issues staff.

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