

Recommendations for Modifications to the Standards of Care in Animal Shelters

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Introduction

This paper provides recommendations for amendments to the Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, published by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (Newbury et al, 2011), hereafter referred to as “the guidelines”. The guidelines are a substantive and thorough document that provides comprehensive recommendations for the operation of animal shelters and for the welfare of animals housed in them. This document is in no way intended as a criticism of the guidelines, its content or the methodology used in developing that document; but is offered to provide updates or clarification of some topics addressed in them based on research into welfare issues encountered by dogs that are housed in shelters.

For the sake of clarity, this paper is organized in order of the subjects covered in the guidelines. Topics raised in this paper are called out by exception, only to address areas in which changes are recommended.

Scope

These recommendations are intended for care of dogs in animal shelters, both privately and publicly owned, that provide the following functions: First, the shelters must have a fixed “brick and mortar” facility in which the animals are housed; foster programs in which dogs are housed with private families are not addressed in this document. Second, the shelters must perform “intake”, meaning that it accepts dogs from various sources, including but not limited to owner surrenders, transfers from other facilities, confiscations by local authorities and stray animals. Lastly, the shelters must also place dogs with adoptive families. As stated above, although shelters perform intake, housing and adoption for multiple domesticated animal species, these recommendations are limited to the care and welfare of sheltered dogs.

Discussion of Guidelines and Recommended Changes

Management and Record Keeping (page 6)

Issue: Under the heading Establishment of Policies and Protocols (p 6), the guidelines provide a general statement indicating that shelters must develop and maintain organizational policies including “those relating to animal care, intake, treatment, adoption and euthanasia”, and for the development of protocols intended to achieve the guidelines’ standards. These statements of purpose leave some critical gaps in the subjects that are addressed in the guidelines that should be mentioned to assure the safety of both animals and staff, notably the issue of disaster response and emergency operations.

Recommendations: The required policy statements should be expanded to include provisions for emergency operations and natural disasters, to include the housing of animals that are displaced by a disaster and the procedures for evacuating the shelter itself. The guidelines should also consider the role that the shelter may play in supporting the local community during a disaster. This should be referenced to current state and federal law on the emergency planning for domesticated animals (Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006; Irvine, 2007).

Issue: The guidelines include a statement that shelters’ protocols should be updated regularly (p6), this statement indicates that expert input should be received from a veterinarian without mentioning other critical areas of expertise. While not disparaging the advice that would be received from a qualified veterinarian, this statement does not address other functional areas that are critical to shelter operation.

Recommendation: Ideally, every review and update of shelter's procedures and protocols should receive expert input from several sources, including experienced animal care personnel, the Board of Directors and shelter management.

Issue: Under the heading of Management Structure (p 6), the guidelines offer a general statement of the need for a shelter to have a clear organizational structure with well-understood responsibilities and authorities for each manager. However, there is no mention of management oversight. Additionally, the guidelines do not address the functional roles that should be undertaken by shelter management.

Recommendations: The guidelines overlook the critical functions provided by a Board of Directors in non-profit organizations in matters such as strategic direction and long-term planning. They should include a clear statement of when shelters should establish a Board of Directors, responsibilities of the board and when one is required under state law (Humane Society of the United States, n.d.). This change should include the functions and responsibilities of the board, and recommendations for the composition and qualifications of the board members (Peters, n.d.).

The guidelines should also suggest management roles and responsibilities that should be identified, such as the role of Director, Adoptions Coordinator, Financial Manager, Development Director, Human Resources Director, and other functional roles; along with recommendations as to when the shelter's size and capacity might require individuals to be dedicated to these functions. This would ensure that adequate attention is paid to the critical areas, and also assist in maintaining due diligence over financial management, budgeting and care (Humane Society of the United States, n.d.).

Facility Design and Environment (pp 7–11)

Issue: The guidelines stress the need for continual air flow through the shelter (pp 9-10), as a means of maintaining air quality, regardless of temperature and humidity levels. However, the requirements for ventilation do not address the vulnerability for disease transmission via aerosolized moisture or airborne particles that can be circulated through a ventilation system. Given the high incidence of infectious diseases, such as Canine Influenza, that are brought into sheltered through the intake of dogs (Pecoraro, Bennett, Nuyvaert, Spindel & Landolt, 2014), measures should be taken to reduce the risk of infectious respiratory diseases and mold spores.

Recommendation: The shelter guidelines for ventilation systems should include strong recommendations for the inclusion of High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters, which have been shown to be effective in reducing airborne hazards in hospital environments (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003; Streifel, 2003). Should the inclusion of high efficiency air filtering be considered impractical for the facility ventilation system, portable HEPA filtration systems should be recommended for indoor areas used to house dogs.

Issue: The guidelines offer a single statement that natural lighting should be used in shelters to the extent possible (pp 10-11, 28). This simple statement, although entirely true, does not fully address the need for natural light for the welfare of mammals. Studies have shown that a natural light and dark cycle is a key element of circadian rhythms, which are critical components of mammals' behavior and physiology (Huang, Ramsey, Marcheva & Bass, 2011). Exposure to natural light on a normal 24-hour light/dark cycle is an important mood regulator and disruption of this regulating element has been shown to result in depression and other affective disorders (Germain & Kupfer, 2008).

Further, the guidelines suggest that artificial light should closely match natural light in duration and intensity, but overlooks the fact that dogs perceive artificial light differently than humans. Artificial lights that are powered on household electrical current have a flicker rate that corresponds to the 50 to 60-hertz electrical cycle. This flicker rate is generally undetectable to humans and appears as a steady light source, however dogs' vision has a higher flicker-fusion rate, and they constantly perceive the flickering of incandescent and fluorescent lights (Horowitz, 2009). Although light flickering is not harmful in itself, it is a sensory input that can contribute to the overall stress of a dog's experience in a shelter, particularly in the case of dogs that are not accustomed to being kept indoors.

Recommendations: Considering the importance of a natural light/darkness cycle, with the particular importance of early morning light to maintaining positive emotional states (Germain & Kupfer, 2008), it is recommended that the guidelines increase the emphasis on the need for natural lighting. The use of windows in kennel areas, should be strongly encouraged, as should the installation of skylights or light pipes wherever possible. In addition, shelters should be strongly encouraged to use artificial lighting consisting of light-emitting diode bulbs with direct-current power supplies, as they do not have the flicker effect associated with other artificial light systems.

Issue: The guidelines correctly state that excessive noise is a common hazard in animals shelters due to a number of unavoidable factors (pp 11, 28). The building itself must be constructed of hard surfaces out of sanitary considerations, and the infrastructure of the shelter (power, ventilation, sanitation, etc) are noisy by necessity. The noise level in shelters is mentioned as often exceeding the levels considered healthy for human occupants and is of particular concern for dogs and other animal species that have more sensitive hearing. In

addition, the noise level in shelters is continuous, allowing the dogs little relief from the stress induced by the high volume of noise (Coppola, Enns & Grandin, 2006). Aside from the stress induced by the high noise levels in kennels, there is evidence that dogs housed under these conditions for extended periods suffer permanent hearing loss (Scheifele, Martin, Clark, Kemper & Wells, 2012). However, the guidelines do not provide substantive recommendations for the reduction of noise.

Recommendation: Given the documented health and welfare issues associated with exposure to high levels of noise (Coppola, Enns & Grandin, 2006; Scheifele, Martin, Clark, Kemper & Wells, 2012), the shelter standards should include recommendations of methods to reduce the amplitude of sound inside kennels and the shelter in general. This should include the use of sound-absorbing ceiling tiles in kennels and corridors as well as providing for sound-absorption above drop ceilings, the placement of sound-absorbing panels on kennel walls above the reach of dogs and the use sound baffles in corridors and common areas. Noise mitigations for building infrastructure systems should also be discussed in detail.

Issue: The guidelines (p 11) cites early studies on the effect of audio stimulation in the form of music as a stress reducing influence in shelters but cautions that the studies are not conclusive and states that electronic equipment can emit high frequency noises that are unpleasant for dogs. This should be reviewed considering later studies discussed below.

Recommendation: Studies performed subsequently to the publication of the standards have shown that playing varieties of music have a calming effect on kenneled dogs (Kogan, Schoenfeld-Tacher & Simon, 2012). Later studies have also established that changing genres of music maintains the calming effect (Bowman, Scottish SPCA, Dowell & Evans, 2017), and that playing audiobooks at normal conversational tones has a distinct calming effect on dogs in

shelters (Brayley & Montrose, 2016). It is recommended that the guidelines be updated to reflect the new data and that this subject be moved from the heading of Sound Control to that of Enrichment and Socialization (p 28).

Medical Health and Physical Well-being, pp 18 – 25:

Issue: The guidelines section on vaccinations (pp19-20) recommends that core vaccinations be performed in accordance with the American Animal Hospital Association guidelines (American Animal Hospital Association, 2017). However, these guidelines do not include the prevention of Canine Influenza, Virus (CIV), which infects large numbers of dogs in shelter environments (Pecoraro, Bennett, Nuyvaert, Spindel & Landolt, 2014).

Recommendation: The guidelines should be revised so that the core vaccination recommendations include CIV inoculations for all strains that are reported to be active in the United States.

Issue: The instructions for performing health monitoring and daily rounds (pp 21-22, 23) require that trained individuals perform regular inspection and observation of kennel animals. While valid, this recommendation is subject to being affected by the high turnover rates in animal shelter staff and volunteer populations, which in turn impacts on the time available for these inspections and the levels of training that have been achieved by the personnel responsible for this action (Turner, Berry & MacDonald, 2012; ; Steneroden, Hill & Salman, 2010; Steneroden, Hill & Salman, 2011).

Recommendation: Given the high potential for shelter staff to be relatively untrained and under time pressures, it is recommended that the guidelines include recommendations for standard procedures for performing health checks. A suggested format for daily medical checks and reporting is included in Appendix A.

Behavioral Health and Mental Well-being (pp 26-30)

Issue: The guidelines advise that a behavioral history should be obtained for all dogs that are turned into a shelter by owners or are impounded by authorities but recommend that this history be obtained through interview rather than through a questionnaire, although questionnaires are also considered to be acceptable (p 26). This approach fails to take into account the emotional state of the owners while surrendering their dogs, which can result in abbreviated or inaccurate information (Marder 2015). Moreover, having incomplete information on the reasons that a dog is being surrendered to a shelter is potentially dangerous for the shelter staff and volunteers that will be interacting with it.

Recommendations: In accordance with the guidelines, the majority of shelters rely heavily on information obtained through owner interviews at the time of surrender, with secondary reliance on a formal intake questionnaire (D'Arpino, Dowling-Guyer, Shabelansky, Marder & Patronek, 2012). To ensure the completeness and accuracy of information received from the owners and caretakers of surrendered dogs, a guided interview and questionnaire process should be used as part of the turn in process. This would allow staff to ensure that complete information is taken regarding the dogs' background, physical and mental health and behavioral issues, and ensure that the information is recorded as a baseline for further assessment (Duffy, Kruger & Serpell, 2014).

Additionally, recognizing the emotions experienced by both the dogs' owners and shelter staff during the surrender process, shelter staff and volunteers should receive coaching and training regarding their interaction with owners and caretakers, both to ensure the accuracy of information received, and to reduce the stress placed on the dogs while being surrendered (Frommer & Arluke, 1999).

Issue: The guidelines correctly state that continuous monitoring is an important component of ensuring the welfare of shelter dogs and cites the need for shelter staff to be trained and aware of body language and stress indicators (pp 26-27), however fails to take into account the fact that training is often constrained by staff and volunteer turnover and funding. Further, a 2012 study indicated that only 40 percent of shelters record dogs' behavior on a daily basis (D'Arpino, Dowling-Guyer, Shabelansky, Marder & Patronek, 2012). This procedural gap, coupled with a potential lack of trained and experienced personnel can lead to the shelter having incomplete and inaccurate information of the mental and emotional state of the individual dogs in its care.

Recommendation: In order to aid staff and volunteers in performing consistent daily evaluations of the dogs in their care and to assist in assessing day-to-day changes in their behavior and emotional state, shelters should establish a standard assessment and documentation process. This requirement should be particularly emphasized in the guidelines due to the ongoing stress and adverse effects that can be experienced by kennelled dogs (Protopopova, 2016). This reporting method should also provide feedback from shelter management on the types of interactions and training that a dog's handlers should undertake. A sample daily report is provided in Appendix B.

Issue: The guidelines provide a statement that a systematic behavioral evaluation should be performed for all animals prior to placement (p 27). The discussion of formal behavior assessment methods correctly states that none of them has been scientifically proven to predict future behavior in homes (Patronek & Bradley 2016) but fails to note the need to forecast potential behavioral problems that might arise while the dog is housed in the shelter, and to aid in

developing and monitoring behavioral modification programs (Dowling-Guyer, Marder, D'Arpino, 2010).

Recommendation: The guidelines should emphasize the need for a formal standardized behavioral test to be used shortly after intake as part of the process of determining dogs' baseline temperament, reactivity and behavioral issues; and should be updated periodically while the dog is housed in the shelter. These tests should be performed by personnel who are trained in their use and in canine behavior; and should not be relied upon as completely accurate predictions of future behavior but should be used as tools along with structured owner interviews and ongoing staff assessments (Marder 2015). In addition to aiding staff in developing individual training plans and providing for the dogs' needs, this assessment of the dogs' reactivity and potential aggression is important to the safety of staff and volunteers who handle the dogs (Bollen & Horowitz, 2007).

Euthanasia (pp 34-36)

Issue: The guidelines provide thorough information on the ethical considerations, rationale for euthanasia and the humane administration of euthanasia methods. However it does not adequately address the psychological and emotional toll that the practice of euthanasia takes on the staff of a shelter (Hart & Mader, 1995). This subject is addressed only by a short sentence indicating support services should be offered to staff "to prevent or managing suffering from grief, compassion fatigue, depression or other physical and emotional reactions related to performing the procedures".

The impact of euthanasia, even when only performed as a medical necessity, has been shown to have considerable adverse emotional and psychology impact on shelter staff and

volunteers (Reeve, Rogelberg, Spitzmüller & DiGiacomo, 2005) , which can not only affect their moral and retention, but their emotional state at the shelter (Frommer & Arluke, 1999).

Recommendation: There are a wide range of interventions and counseling options to help shelter staff cope with the emotional burden of performing euthanasia, as well as procedural methods of mitigating the toll on staff – such as performing euthanasia early in the morning, to permit staff to recover and have positive experiences during the day, rather than having the death of an animal be their last action prior to going home (Rogelberg et al, 2007). The guidelines for euthanasia should be revised after receiving input from qualified mental health professionals on assisting shelter staff deal with emotional and psychological impact of this necessary shelter function. ma

Conclusion

Several recommendations have been proposed to supplement the practices discussed in the guidelines as a means of enhancing the message and overall effectiveness of that document. In most cases, such as the implementation of structured daily welfare checks and the discussion of euthanasia, the recommendations are intended to address the human side of shelter management and help to support shelter staff and volunteers in performing their assigned work.

One overall conclusion that can be drawn from these recommendations is that the existing guidelines do not provide sufficient emphasis on the human factors associated with shelter work. The daily stress of this work and the highly emotional nature of dealing with neglected or abandoned animals, generally expressed as compassion fatigue, impacts the effectiveness and retention of even the most dedicated staff and volunteer personnel (Scotney, McLaughlin & Keates, 2015). Measures to reduce the stress and compassion fatigue of shelter

workers and mitigate their effects on day to day operation (Rogelberg et al, 2007) should receive greater emphasis in future editions of the guidelines.

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Appendix A

Daily Medical Welfare Check

This checklist and protocol is intended to function as a guideline and aid to shelters for the consistent and systematic identification and tracking of health issues for dogs housed in their facilities. The attached set of checks is a recommendation, and shelters should tailor the items listed in it to suit their individual needs and regulatory requirements.

However, these items should be monitored daily for each dog housed in the shelter and compared with information noted in previous checks. Any new behaviors or welfare-related items that had not been seen previously, or are significantly changed from previous reporting, should be reported to shelter management.

If an item noted with an asterisk (*) is noted during the daily check for any dogs, the shelter manager responsible for that animal should be informed immediately.

Daily Health Check

Dog's Name:

ID Number:

Date/Time:

Name:

Item checked	Yes/No	Describe	Change from Previous Day
<u>Injuries</u>			
Visible Wounds *			
Blood visible on the dog or In the run *			
Pressing head against the wall or a corner of the run *			
<u>Activity Level</u>			
Dog is depressed or inactive			
Seems to be stiff or in pain			
Limping			
<u>Heart / Lungs</u>			
Difficulty breathing*			
Coughing			
<u>Ears/Nose/Throat</u>			
Discharge from nose or eyes			
Odor or discoloration in ears			
Red gums or bad breath			
<u>Digestion</u>			
Eating less than normal			

Diahhrea, loose or watery stools			
<u>Urination</u>			
Drinking more than normal			
Urinating more often than normal, or urinating higher than normal volume			
<u>Skin and Coat</u>			
Lumps under skin			
Thinning hair/bald patches			
Hair dry or dull			
Visible sores			
Itches or scratches excessively			

Source: www.amcnyc.org/pet-care/pet-health-checklist#

Appendix B

These items should be carefully checked and monitored on a daily basis to determine the mental and emotional welfare of each dog housed in the shelter. The regular and systematic monitoring of shelter dogs' behavior is critical in identifying behavioral or stress-related issues, and in tracking the progress of staff's efforts to address issues that have already been noted.

Kennel personnel are a mix of staff and volunteers with varying levels of training and familiarity with individual dogs, and perceptions of dogs' behavior will vary among human observers regardless of their level of training and experience. This recommended protocol is a tool to aid the staff in identifying potential issues and communicating them to management, and in tracking the general welfare of individual dogs. Shelters should modify this checklist as necessary to meet their individual needs or regulatory requirements.

Daily Behavior and Welfare Check

Dog's Name:

ID Number:

Date/Time:

Name:

Observed Behavior	Yes/No or Not Observed	Describe Observed Behavior	Change from the Previous Interaction or Observation
<u>In-kennel Behavior</u>			
Pacing or circling			
Excessive licking, tail biting or self-chewing			
Depressed / withdrawn			
Wall bouncing / continual jumping-up			
Showing signs of fearfulness: Tail tucked, head down			
Friendly to staff or visitors			
Retreating to the back of the run			
Urinate upon meeting people / Submissive urination			
Tail wagging: relaxed, or stiff and/or slow			
Growling at staff or visitors			
Excessive barking at staff or visitors			
Avoiding touch by staff or volunteers			
Guarding food or toys			
<u>Socialization with Humans</u>			

Overly excited greeting			
Mouthing / grabbing			
Easily excited/aroused			
Mouthing during play			
Avoiding eye contact			
Avoiding touch			
Fearful attitude			
<u>Socialization with other dogs</u>			
Interested / calm			
Excited / lunging			
Quiet / tense			
Staring			
Initiates play / play bows			
<u>Training</u>			
Describe any training attempted or continued with a description of method used and results			
<u>For Management:</u>			
Instructions for socialization and stress reduction.			
Instructions for training and Behavior modification			

Source: various