

OH, FOR CRITTERS' SAKES!

INTRODUCTION

Companion animals, service animals and farm animals are an important part of our community. How these animals are treated or mistreated, what is done to ensure their safety and ours and where we go for help with both wild and domestic animals are areas of concern to the 2010/2011 San Diego County Grand Jury (Grand Jury).

INVESTIGATION

Want a dog? Lost a cat? Found a goat? Threatened by a loose animal? Whose job is it to protect animals from abuse? Should you call County of San Diego Department of Animal Services? How does the County of San Diego (County) take care of the thousands of animals that are entrusted to its care every year?

Members of the Grand Jury visited the three County of San Diego Animal Shelters located in the Central Region (City of San Diego), the Northern Region (City of Carlsbad), and the Southern Region (in Bonita). During the visits, all phases of animal care were reviewed. The Grand Jury observed:

- Animal enclosures, kennels, cages and corrals.
- Medical facilities, storage areas, offices, the county vehicle yard.
- Play areas where potential adopters can meet the animals.
- Music is available to soothe the animals.

Statistics on animal care, provided by the County Department of Animal Services (DAS), were analyzed.

DISCUSSION

Animal Services has a yearly budget of \$15 million dollars, of which \$6 million comes from the City of San Diego. The rest of the funding comes from the other five contract cities, the County, fees charged and donations. The Department provides animal related law enforcement, sheltering, medical and pet adoption services to the unincorporated areas of the County, and, by contract to the cities of San Diego, Carlsbad, Encinitas, Solana Beach, Del Mar, and Santee. The DAS staff include Animal Control Officers who investigate reports of animal abuse, as well as violations of local regulatory laws, animal care staff who manage the shelters, veterinary staff who treat sick and injured animals; clerical staff who answer the telephones and assist the public at the front counters; and volunteers who assist with the socialization and enrichment of the shelter animals. Heated coils in the floor keep the animals warm. The Carlsbad shelter even provides music to soothe and relax the animals.

The shelters rely heavily on the volunteers to save money although they are an adjunct to paid staff. The number of staff and volunteers varies at each facility. Funded by the County, the department also partners with the Workforce Academy for Youth Program (WAY), which is designed to help teens transitioning out of foster care into adult jobs and independence.

Each facility may have 100 or more volunteers, 25 to 35 of which are very committed to working weekly. Volunteers must work five hours per month. Walking dogs, bathing animals, making and changing bedding, washing dishes and helping with a myriad of other details saves the facilities both staff time and the County money.

The County conducts an Animal Law Enforcement Academy and invites officers from throughout the state. The academy lasts for 12 weeks; officers from outside DAS pay their own training costs.

It is important to note that one of the most difficult jobs that Animal Control Officers perform is to investigate allegations of animal abuse. Officers investigate all alleged abuses and when necessary makes arrests or submits cases to the District Attorney's office for prosecution. The DAS has joined San Diego County Crime Stoppers to help stop animal cruelty. Effective early in 2011, citizens may now report animal related crimes to Crime Stoppers. If an arrest is made and a reward has been authorized, the caller may be eligible to collect.

Department Animal Service Representatives and a dispatcher answer 300,000 phone calls per year (100-125 emergency calls per day) and thirty-one Animal Control Officers manage some 500 active cases in all three regions daily within the 4000 square miles of the County.

Animals in custody of the Department are either claimed by their owners, re-homed to new families, or exited to one of the 158 Adoption Partners (Rescue Groups). Animals with identification, such as microchips, license tags or other identification must be held for five working days and the owner is notified by phone or by mail. It takes about a week for an animal to be adopted; however, some may be sheltered for up to one year for various reasons, such as court cases.

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the Department provides coupons to residents who reside in the Department's service area that help the owner pay for the costs of having their pet spayed or neutered. Coupons are usually worth \$50.00 for spaying and \$25.00 for castration. The animal control facilities offer low or no cost adoptions for the senior citizens and, on special occasions, the general public.

Euthanasia is a serious issue that the shelters handle daily. The Grand Jury doubts the public is actually aware of the number of animals that are destroyed yearly due to illness, dangerous behavior and unfortunately, to overcrowding at the shelters. The numbers are extremely high, yet the shelters have varied programs to save as many animals as possible.

Animal Control Officers, animal care attendants and supervising animal care attendants who perform euthanasia must receive training in the techniques associated with the process. Certification requires at least five hours of hands-on training in humane animal restraint techniques and proper injection procedures.

The three shelters combined averaged more than 26,000 animals taken in per year for the past five years. During the same time period, no **adoptable** animals were euthanized. However, of the total number of animals taken in, more than 30 percent per year are euthanized. This percentage represents more than 7,000 animals for each of the last five years. In the same time period, cats euthanized averaged 4,500 per year, and dogs averaged 2,470 per year.

Many animals that come to the shelters are in need of medical attention. Veterinarians and/or Registered Veterinary Technicians are on-site daily to see to the health and welfare of all the animals. Animals that may be restored to healthy state are medically treated. There are some rescue groups who take these special-needs animals and find homes for them. Those who are not placed must be euthanized. Adoptable animals must be physically, medically, behaviorally and age appropriate before qualifying for adoption.

All public calls for assistance, complaints, as well as coordination of services are directed through a centralized call center. This process saves money by reducing duplication of some personnel services.

At this time, most County animal control officers have laptop computers for use in the field. This frees them to be in the field longer each day and increases the number of calls to which they can respond. The new computers also free the officers from waiting for a dispatcher to contact them for emergencies.

A "complaint" log is kept in the administration office. This log contains notations of letters and calls requesting service, such as loose dogs, wild animal problems, questions about fees, etc., plus the few complaints about how the DAS delivers their service. The Grand Jury believes the complaint log should be separated into two sections, with one section designated for animal problems in the community and the other for complaints about the department. The department has a prioritized response chart (see attachment A) denoting type of service, response priority levels, response guidelines as well as the reasons for delayed response times.

A special program available to all facilities is the Spirit Medical Trust fund. This program, funded by private donations, provides extraordinary care to animals with unique medical issues, which in turn frees public funds for other sheltered animals.

Science Diet donates food for most of the animals at all three shelters. This saves Animal Services approximately \$100,000 per year after paying shipping costs. In an attempt to make the transition from shelter to home as easy as possible for the animals, Science Diet also provides a "starter" bag of food that goes home with each adoptee. This helps prevent some early digestive problems.

Adoption fees vary throughout the year with special programs that are sometimes available. The standard adoption fee is \$69.00 for a dog, which covers the adoption, micro-chipping, immunizations, and spaying or neutering if necessary. The DAS has

recently partnered with “Pets for Patriots,” an organization that supports our military members and veterans in their efforts to adopt pets.¹

The Impound Alter Fund is a special program. If an owner claims an unaltered pet from the shelter, a \$40.00 deposit is required in addition to fees required to claim the unaltered animal. If the animal is altered within 30 days, the \$40 deposit is refunded. However, if the owner opts to use the Spay-Neuter Incentive Program (SNIP), the animal is altered, micro-chipped, vaccinated and licensed, and all fees are reduced to \$70. This is just one way to encourage people to spay/neuter their pets. Owners may save up to \$320 for a dog and up to \$140 for a cat using the SNIP. Since 2002 more than 4,149 animals have taken part in the SNIP program. During this same period, impoundments have declined, and owners claiming their animals have increased. The percentage of adoptable animals that are euthanized has decreased from 1,236 to zero, and the number of dog licenses has increased.

Staff members interviewed when asked of what they were most proud; responded:

Compassionate staff

Fantastic volunteers

Rescue groups

Being able to do more for aged animals

Educational programs

Graduating 80-100 in the WAY program over a four year period.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: All the statistics noted in this report came from San Diego County Department of Animal Services.

Fact: The three San Diego County animal shelters receive more than 26,000 animals per year.

Fact: In the past six years, the number of animals reunited with their owners averaged about 18 %. Cat reunions averaged 3% while 35% of dogs were reunited with their owners.

Fact: In the past six years, about 67% of all intake animals were returned home or were adopted/transferred.

Fact: Department of Animal Services follows a very detailed protocol for euthanizing animals.

Fact: The Department of Animal Services established a “Spirit Medical Fund” to provide for extraordinary services for animals, which saved the County approximately \$61,101.74. The County has \$216,066.92 in their Spay Neuter Public Education Fund.

¹ www.petsforpatriots.org

Fact: Crime Stoppers, working with Department of Animal Services, is authorizing rewards up to \$1000 (donated by San Diego Animal Advocates) for information leading to a felony arrest in animal cruelty cases.

Fact: Thousands of animals are in need of shelter services yearly. The Department of Animal Services is working diligently to reduce the number of animals lost, the victims of cruelty, and/or euthanized due to lack of a home or medical care.

Finding 01: The current complaint log combines calls for animal services as well as complaints against the department.

Finding 02: Volunteers play a vital role in the care and comfort of the animals in the shelters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2010/2011 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends the San Diego County Department of Animal Services:

- 11-16: Develop a plan to increase public awareness of the benefits of spaying/neutering pets.**

- 11-17: Develop a plan to increase public awareness of the coupons available for spay and neuter discounts.**

- 11-18: Develop a plan to increase public awareness of micro-chipping services.**

- 11-19: Divide the complaint logs into two parts, one for problems requesting help and one noting complaints against the department.**

- 11-20: Provide all Animal Control Officers in the field with laptop computers as soon as fiscally possible.**

COMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury commends the staff and volunteers in the San Diego County Department of Animal Services for the following:

- County Animal Shelters for their efforts to serve and protect the citizens and animals of San Diego County.
- County Animal Control officers' and staff's participation in the Workforce Academy for Youth program.
- Partnering with Crime Stoppers in an effort to reduce cruelty to animals in San Diego County.
- Establishing the "Spirit Medical Fund" which helps animals and saves the County money.
- Partnering with "Pets for Patriots" to help military veterans adopt shelter pets.

The Grand Jury commends the producers of Science Diet for their donation of food to all three centers and to the public who adopts animals.

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
 - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
 - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters

over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<u>Responding Agency</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Date</u>
San Diego County Department of Animal Services	11-16 through 11-20	7/18/11

ATTACHMENT A

**DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES
RESPONSE PRIORITY LEVELS**

TYPE OF SERVICE	RESPONSE PRIORITY LEVEL	
	IN PROGRESS	NOT IN PROGRESS
Threatening Dangerous Animal	1	3
Possible Rabid/Biter Animal	1	3
Major Injury to Animal	1	3
Threat from Wild Animal	1	3
Cruelty	1	3
Animal Inside Vehicle	1	3
Fighting Animals	1	3
Dogs Harassing Livestock	1	3
Sick/Minor Injury animal	2	3
Animal Welfare	2	3
Isolation of Biting Animal for Rabies Examination	3	N/A
Confined Stray Animal	3	N/A
Relinquished Animal	3	N/A
Restraint of Animal	3	4
Wild Animal	3	4
Misc. Patrol Services	3	4

Priority Level	Response Guidelines	NOTE
LEVEL 1	First priority; officer response is ASAP	Actual response times vary depending upon the number and location of calls and available officers. Some requests for service may be unserved and some initial and/or follow-up responses may exceed the time period guidelines.
LEVEL 2	Second priority; response objective is within 12 hours of receipt.	
LEVEL 3	Third priority; response objective is within 24 hours of receipt.	
LEVEL 4	Fourth priority; response objective is within 72 hours of receipt.	