

Shelter Operations- 000-30
[Enter effective date]

EUTHANASIA DECISIONS

Notes:

- The purpose of this SOP is to provide a guideline and basic criteria to be considered in all euthanasia decisions.
- A consistent, documented decision process helps everyone understand the process and know what to expect, which is particularly important for one of the most heart-wrenching aspects of animal welfare work.
- Evaluate your state and local laws as they relate to euthanasia before a stray hold period ends. Most states and localities have laws that only a licensed veterinarian can make this decision, so investigate these laws carefully before establishing your policies.
- Be sure to review all of this SOP carefully with your medical advisor, and edit this information to reflect your agency's policies and protocols for euthanasia.

Begin Sample SOP

We are an "open-admission" shelter, which means that every companion animal in need of shelter and care is welcome here. We offer all animals a refuge, regardless of whether we believe that animal is adoptable. We are dedicated to preventing animal suffering and cruelty and to providing quality care for every animal.

Humane euthanasia of animals - a practice acknowledged by most animal protection organizations as an acceptable means for alleviating or preventing suffering – is still necessary due to the surplus of animals received at our shelter and those in the surrounding communities. Euthanasia is not a decision we take lightly, but one we must make nonetheless.

We sincerely wish that every animal that comes to us could be adopted to a caring, responsible home. Unfortunately, there aren't enough quality homes for placement. We evaluate the health and temperament of each animal on an individual basis. We use our experience and protocol to evaluate an animal's needs and balance those needs with the greater good of the animal population in our care. Since euthanasia is the final act of kindness that can be shown to an animal, it is the policy of the [Enter your shelter's name] that animals be handled with respect and sensitivity and protected from stress, fear, discomfort, and pain.

Each animal who comes to us is evaluated in entirety; taking into account both behavior and medical conditions. Euthanasia must be considered:

- When an animal is felt to be suffering mentally, emotionally or physically with a poor prognosis, protracted painful recovery, or incurable illness
- When an animal is deemed to pose an unacceptable danger to other animals, itself, or the public

We also recognize the adoptability of animals in shelters may be impacted by:

- temperament
- previous history, age, breed, health
- ability to cope with kennel stress
- space, time of year

- foster care resources, human resources, budget
- personal attachments by staff and volunteers
- requirements ordered by the courts or Animal Control

Our evaluation process assesses an animal's behavior, temperament and health. The evaluation process is a tool to help the Director of Shelter Operations, Kennel Manager, Veterinarian and Behavior Manager assess an animal's behavior and health. This information is used to determine if an animal is healthy, treatable, or unhealthy/untreatable:

- Animals that rate high in the evaluation are healthy and adoptable.
- Treatable animals may be borderline but could respond with treatment.
- Unhealthy animals are clearly sick or are unsafe for the community.

Animals may display behavior patterns or have physical conditions that would make them difficult to care for at the shelter or in a home environment. Some animals may be dangerous to people or other animals and it would be not be in the best interest of [Enter your shelter's name] or the community to place such animals.

Information from the behavior and health evaluations is included in the decision making process. Management reviews euthanasia decisions daily. When there are conflicts about a euthanasia decision, the management team will review the case and make a final decision. Staff members must bring questions about euthanasia decisions directly to the Director of Shelter Operations.

Evaluators clearly document the specific reasons for euthanasia decisions based on the language used in the guideline. All animals slated for euthanasia will be scanned for a microchip and checked for a tattoo. If the animal is a stray, a final search will be conducted in lost animal reports.

THE DECISION MAKERS

Daily Walk-Through Process

The kennel supervisor, and/or the Director of Shelter Operations, in consultation with the veterinarian if necessary, walk through the shelter daily to select animals for possible euthanasia, taking into account the animal's health, behavior assessment, "holds", and adoptability.

During this walk through the shelter each afternoon animals are evaluated.

- If an animal is sick or it is showing signs of an oncoming illness, the animal is moved to the isolation area for that species, notations are made on an animal's kennel card and in the computer record as to the type of illness and its severity.
- If the animal is treatable with medication, therapy will be offered and documented by the veterinarian.
- If an animal's illness is contagious (i.e. it may infect the entire kennel or human health) or if the animal is suffering, the veterinarian may authorize euthanasia and note accordingly.
- Animals with clinical signs and a positive Parvo snap test are immediately euthanized.

NOTE: Although an animal may be considered for euthanasia, if euthanasia is not immediate and the animal can be kept comfortable, the animal is still given medications to increase his or her comfort and reduce pain.

Alternatives

Alternative options will always be reasonably explored for animals initially accepted for adoption but that fail to continue to meet the criteria for adoptability. Some examples of options to pursue include cooperating with other placement facilities and assisting with appropriate foster care. The shelter works with many reputable breed placement partners who may also be able to assist.

Pre-euthanasia Checklist.

- This checklist is then checked against lost reports on file.
- Pull files for any animals in the adoption area who are on the checklist, and clip these files to the checklist.
- The checklist with any file attachments is given to the Director of Operations for final approval.
 - The DO pulls up the computer record and ensures that the checks the animal against lost reports, adoption applications, special holds, etc., to ensure then animal can be euthanized and no mistakes are being made.
 - The DO then creates a memo that says “approved and scheduled for E and D”
 - The checklist is complete when it is approved, signed, and dated by the DO.
 - Any animals on the list currently in the adoption area must then moved to the back to ensure no mistake is made. The DO should do this at the time the list is approved.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING ANIMALS FOR EUTHANASIA

It is critical for staff and volunteers who do not make euthanasia decisions to understand the pain, emotion, and guilt associated with this role. The decision-makers face a difficult task, and their selections must be respected, even if they are different from your own.

We strive to be compassionate, fair, and professional as we accept the responsibility for managing the thousands of homeless animals that enter our shelter each year. Making euthanasia decisions is difficult and emotional for those who must choose.

Determinations regarding some animals are clearer than others. To assist the staff who must perform that role, criteria are listed below that may help in those grueling moments.

Stray Animals

Strays are kept for 5 days before we can make the decision to place the animal up for adoption, or consider euthanasia. However, if the animal is suffering due to severe injury or illness, the animal may be euthanized before hold period ends with a veterinarian’s approval. Records must be clearly noted with the medical reasons for euthanasia. (See next page for the full policy.)

If the animal is neither ill nor claimed, he or she can be considered for adoption, transfer to partner shelter, remain at the shelter, or euthanized on the sixth day.

Owner-surrendered Animals

The Shelter will euthanize animals of citizens requesting this service. There may be occasions when a pet owner requests euthanasia but the staff member receiving the animal feels that it is adoptable. The employee may discuss this with the owner and may consult a supervisor. If the owner remains adamant, the animal should be euthanized.

Purebred Animals

Because many breeds have rescue groups, purebreds are not to be euthanized without first attempting to place the animal in rescue. All efforts must be exhausted before euthanizing these animals. However, if the animal is aggressive or ill, he or she may be euthanized without consulting rescue.

Illness or Injury

Animals can be considered for euthanasia if:

- their injuries or illness is untreatable
- treatment is cost prohibitive for the average person (i.e. severely broken bones, broken backs, and extensive burns)
- keeping the animal alive would result in pain or a poor quality-of-life

Other circumstances may also affect euthanasia decisions:

- If a veterinarian has noted that an animal has a serious illness, that animal is to be selected for euthanasia over a healthy animal.
- If an animal is suffering, euthanasia is to be performed on the same day. The kennel staff must advise the veterinarians immediately of any sick, injured, or suffering animal.
- If the animal has an injury or condition that is painful but not life-threatening, he or she is to be medicated to relieve the pain. However, if evaluating for space reasons, injury or illness may be considered a reason for euthanasia.
- Owner-requested euthanasia will be performed immediately.

Stray Animals Euthanized before Stray Period or Brought in Dead on Arrival (DOA).

When an animal is euthanized before the stray period expires, communicate this information to the front office in case any owner comes in looking for that animal.

In addition:

- Update the euthanized animal's computer record.
- Copy the intake form with the reason the euthanasia was performed, and obtain a Polaroid picture of the animal. Take these to the client care office and placed them in the 3-ring binder labeled "STRAY EUTHANASIA/DOA".

It is the responsibility of the person actually performing the euthanasia to take the picture and make the copy of the intake and bring it to the client care office. Since only the staff veterinarian can authorize the euthanasia of a stray animal still in the stray period, the veterinarian or those directed by that person are responsible for following through the process.

If the animal is taken to an emergency clinic and euthanized at the clinic, it is the responsibility of the animal control officer to take the picture and make the copy of the form and bring it to the binder in client care.

- Bag the animal and place the bag in the Freezer with a HOLD sign filled out and taped to the bag. This will prevent the animal from being picked up by the crematory service until the stray period is over.

Any DOA's picked up are handled in the same manner.

The STRAY EUTHANASIA/DOA binder should be reviewed daily by client care staff against any lost reports filed in addition to the shelter inventory. After the stray hold has expired, the intake form and photo can be discarded.

Animals in Adoption Area

Euthanasia decisions must be made when there are animals in the healthy hold area of the shelter who are adoption candidates and need to move to adoption. Animals who have been in the adoption area who may fall in one of these categories may need to be considered for euthanasia:

- Dogs whose behavior is becoming worse: i.e. leaping up, trying to escape, trying to bite, and charging the gate.
- Dogs who have been up for adoption for weeks/months with no interest and are becoming lethargic, aggressive, or barrier aggressive.

Aggressive Animals

Any animal regardless of its size, sex, or breed who is known to be aggressive or exhibits signs of aggression towards people or other animals may be euthanized. Determination of aggression can be made from past history, day-to-day interaction with the staff and volunteers, and through a behavior evaluation using Meet Your Match® SAFER™.

Aggression includes:

- defensive and threatening behaviors
- actual attacks
- lunging at humans
- baring teeth
- exhibiting other characteristics that may make it a poor family companion for the average adopter

Generally, cats need more time to adjust to the surroundings and noises. They should be placed in a quiet cage, with the front covered with a towel, and then re-evaluated after they have been given time to relax.

Wildlife

Generally, most wildlife comes to us injured, and rehabilitation is not possible or extremely difficult or stressful for the animal. If the veterinarian feels the animal (other than raccoons) can be rehabilitated, a licensed wildlife rehabilitation facility or rehabilitator is located.

Holding Times

Individual animals may be marked “Do not E&D” which means that animal cannot be euthanized without permission from the Executive Director or the person who asked for the animal to be held. Holding animals makes euthanasia decisions extremely difficult. It is important to understand that if one dog is held, another is euthanized in its place.

If “do not E&D” is placed on the animal’s record, it must also contain the full name of the staff person who placed the hold.

Below are standard holding times:

Rescue	Animals may be held for 14 days after contacting rescue, but every attempt must be made to move the animal immediately.
Off-site Adoption Days	Off-site adoption days are generally held on Saturdays. If animals do not get adopted and come back to the shelter, they will be held until the following Monday (9 days) before being euthanized.
Pet-of-the-Week	A date on top of the paperwork is the ending period for holding.

Summary

Euthanasia is an emotional and heart-wrenching process for those involved. It’s a decision no one wants to make or carry out. But, we also know there isn’t another option unless the animals are housed indefinitely in a cage or kennel off-premises. Quality-of-life is our guiding principle. We don’t believe in warehousing animals for the sake of saving their lives.

We hope there will be a day when healthy animals are no longer euthanized for space or lack of homes. Our educational and veterinary programs are attacking the problems at the source with aggressive spay/neuter, education, and adoption programs. Until that time comes, we have assumed the responsibility of humanely euthanizing those animals that have found no home.

Shelter Operations- 000-31
[Enter effective date]

EUTHANASIA TECHNICAL PROCEDURES

Notes:

- The purpose of this SOP is to provide detailed information about the technical approaches you use in performing euthanasia.
- Be sure to review this SOP carefully with your medical advisor, and edit this information to reflect your agency's policies and protocols for euthanasia.
- Your State Animal Welfare regulations/ordinances should be reviewed as you write this section.
- Review your State Controlled substances and Federal DEA regulations.
- It is highly recommended that you receive and review The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) Euthanasia Training Manual (enter link to order book)
- It is critical that you are clear in the details so the leaders of your organization are assured that procedures around euthanasia are performed with compassion, care, and technical skill.
- Suggested areas to cover as you write your procedure for this section:
 - Animal Handling
 - Presence of other animals
 - How to control entry into the room during the procedure
 - How to determine this is the correct animal (checking paperwork, signing off procedure)
 - How solution administered (route, amount, and pre-euthanasia procedures)
 - How the animal is cared for after injection
 - Determining death
 - How to log the controlled substances.