

Shelter Operations

Revised January 2017 EUTHANASIA DECISIONS

We are an “open-admission” shelter for Madison County, which means that every dog and cat in need of shelter and care is welcome here. 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 animals received at our shelter with medical or aggression issues. 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, that isn't always the case. 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 overall quality of life.

Since euthanasia is the final act of kindness that can be shown to an animal, it is the policy of Wanderers' Rest Humane Association 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, 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 when all other options have been exhausted

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
- foster care resources, human resources, budget
- requirements ordered by the courts or Animal Control
- Veterinary recommendations

Our evaluation process assesses an animal's behavior, temperament and health. The evaluation process is a tool to help the Shelter Manager and staff 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, but other options will be exhausted first unless the animal's quality of life is suffering.

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

Evaluators clearly document the specific reasons for euthanasia decisions based on the language used in the guideline.

THE DECISION MAKERS

The Animal Care staff and Shelter Manager in consultation with a veterinarian if necessary, will assess animals for euthanasia, taking into account the animal's health, behavior assessment, "holds", and adoptability.

- Only animals that have severe or emergency medical issues that cannot be treated, or would harm the animal's quality of life; or display severe aggression that staff has attempted to work with or find other options, will be considered for euthanasia.
- A euthanasia request is printed using the PetPoint Program and submitted to the Shelter Manager for review.
- Any medical history, behavior evaluations, or incident reports should be submitted with the euthanasia request. Behavior evaluation videos may be reviewed at the time of request.

The Shelter Manager will sign off on the euthanasia and inform a veterinarian that a euthanasia needs to be done. Euthanasia will be completed within 24 hours of the request being submitted (exception being animals that are suffering).

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

Some examples of options to pursue/explore before euthanasia is decided include cooperating with other placement facilities and assisting with appropriate foster care, contacting rescues or trainers, and reaching out to the public for help. The shelter works with many reputable breed placement partners who may also be able to assist.

Pre-euthanasia Checklist.

- Checked against lost reports on file.
- Checked against rescue correspondences
- Checked against adoption applications
- Checked against foster correspondences

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 Dogs

Unlicensed stray dogs are kept for 7 days before we can make the decision to place the animal up for adoption, or consider other options (foster, rescue, etc.). Licensed dogs must be held for 10 days while shelter staff make every effort to contact the known owner. However, if the animal is suffering due to severe injury or illness, the animal may be euthanized before hold period ends if the animal control officer has been alerted and with a veterinarian's approval. Records must be clearly noted with the medical reasons for euthanasia. A veterinarian must sign their approval on any stray on a stray hold.

If the dog is neither ill nor claimed, he or she can be considered for adoption, transfer to partner rescue, or remain at the shelter while other options are considered/acted upon.

Owner-requests

Wanderers' Rest Humane Association will not euthanize animals for the public. Staff will advise the public to speak with their veterinarian about this decision.

Illness or Injury

Animals can be considered for euthanasia if:

- their injuries or illness are untreatable
- treatment is cost prohibitive for the average person or the shelter (i.e. severely broken bones, mange, wounds, broken backs, extensive burns, etc.), once staff has discussed if the price can be reached. Staff may also seek out the public and other sources to raise said funds.
- keeping the animal alive would result in pain or a poor quality-of-life
- Provided treatment for an illness has not been effective and other options have been exhausted

Other circumstances may also affect euthanasia decisions:

- If an animal is severely suffering, euthanasia is to be performed on the same day.

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 digital picture of the animal. The photo and intake information will be placed in PetPoint and marked as "STRAY EUTHANASIA/DOA".

Since only a 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.

- Bag the animal and place the bag in the Freezer with a tag containing the control number and end of hold date. The bag will remain in the freezer until the HOLD period is complete.

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

DOA's will be marked in the computer as such. A lost report will be filed. Place a tag on the bag with the animal's control number and date of arrival.

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.

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
- Attacking other animals

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. All animals need to be given the appropriate amount of time to adjust to the environment and staff. If weeks go by without improvement, other options will be attempted (rescue, trainer, foster, etc.), before euthanasia will be considered.

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. Staff will do everything in their power to ensure that euthanasia is the last/most humane option for each animal in question.

Even with all our efforts to ensure animals are not euthanized due to space reasons, there may come a day that the shelter becomes over-populated and the quality of life of some may suffer. If this is the case, euthanasia decisions will be based on those who are being worked with to become adoptable or are under constant medical treatment. However, until that day, we only euthanize those animals that are severely suffering from illness/injury or display severe aggression to the point that we have no other options and their quality of life is suffering.