



State of Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

Office of the Governor

3101 W. Napoleon Avenue, Suite 102, Metairie, LA 70001

(504) 219-4593

Report submitted to: Ouachita Parish Animal Control Officials and Ouachita Parish Government

Date of Report: September 29, 2009

Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facilities located in West Monroe, Louisiana. The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) is very grateful for your cooperation in the audit. The goal of this audit is to assist local and parish governing agencies in evaluating shelter facilities and planning improvements. Please accept the following comments in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

The Ouachita Parish animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. Hours of operation and emergency contact information are displayed at the entrance to the shelter. Evidence of adequate record keeping was observed by inspectors. The shelter provides services to the citizens of Ouachita Parish during regularly scheduled business hours. Fees are registered with the parish and are included in parish ordinances. The shelter staff provides the shelter with a regular program of pest and rodent control pursuant to the shelter's own policy and procedures manual. Veterinary care is provided by a local private practice veterinarian on a regular basis. Spay/neuter policies meet accepted standards in Louisiana and shelter personnel demonstrate a basic knowledge of infection control when queried by OPH inspectors. Primary animal enclosures appear to be well maintained and sanitation methods appear to be compliant with acceptable methods of shelter hygiene. The shelter maintains a separate room and table for euthanasia procedures and all euthanasia is performed by certified animal euthanasia technicians. Lethal injection, the preferred method of euthanasia in most pet species, is the exclusive method of euthanasia employed at the shelter. Although near capacity, the shelter population is maintained in caging that does not show indications of overcrowding. Each year all shelter employees receive a minimum of eight hours of continuing education in varied subjects related to animal control, husbandry, humane procedures, animal handling, restraint, etc, reflecting management's awareness of the importance of employee training.

The shelter is also to be commended for employing a seven day holding policy on healthy stray animals, prior to decisions on euthanasia or adoption. In many jurisdictions the duration of holding is much shorter and adversely affects efforts to return strays to owners.

I. The following suggestions are made based on the state statute (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) listing minimum standards that may be adopted by parish governing authorities:

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A. Shelter standards: Although Ouachita Animal Control abides by parish ordinance 8252 in issues related to cruelty to animals, vicious animals, and rabies quarantine; shelter standards, such as those specified in the Louisiana Revised Statutes, are not included in the ordinance. Parish government is strongly urged to include shelter standards in parish ordinances.

B. Adequate local supervision: Louisiana law states that "shelters should be inspected at least once every six months by an authorized representative of the parish to determine compliance with the requirements" set forth in state statutes. Although the supervisory structure of the shelter was thoroughly explained to the auditors, a formal inspection program has not been implemented. LAWC suggests that the parish establish a regular program of inspection and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors. This system of inspection should be recorded in a written policy. It was noted by OPH inspectors that the shelter does consult with OPH Environmental Services on issues of sanitation and that the shelter has been inspected in the past by OPH sanitarians.

C. Food storage: Louisiana law states that "Supplies of food and bedding shall be stored in facilities which adequately protect such supplies against infestation or contamination by vermin." Dry, donated food is removed from bags immediately after arrival at the facility. The dry food is stored in barrels on the outside veranda of the facility. The food storage area was noted to be cluttered and untidy. Plastic wrap is used to cover the food. The plastic wrap was observed to be punctured in several places, possibly by workers accessing the food or from invasive pests, such as rodents. LAWC recommends that the barrels be more securely sealed to not only prevent entry by vermin, but also to preserve the feed against the effects of environmental elements. Exposure of dry feed to atmospheric moisture may lead to increased water volume and consequently unwanted microbial multiplication. There is potential for food borne disease or toxin transmission should this humidification occur. Excessive numbers of flies were observed in the food storage area, again indicating that the food is not sealed or stored properly. Improvements in food storage areas at this facility are encouraged. This should improve the situation with the flies and other insects. Perhaps screening or other structural improvements could be added to the present facility to reduce exposure of food to insects.

Cleaning supplies were also observed to be stored in a shed where dry food is received. The food is offloaded directly adjacent to the cleaning supplies. It is recommended that food products and cleaning supplies be separated. This can be accomplished by restructuring the storage plan so that cleaning supplies are kept in a separate area of the facility, or by confining cleaning supply storage to an opposite end of the storage room and placing signs in the room identifying the cleaning supply storage area. Of course cleaning supplies should never be stored above food of any type.

D. Washrooms and Plumbing: The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "Facilities such as washrooms, basins, or sinks, shall be provided to maintain cleanliness among animal caretakers." Additional wash basins are desirable in animal wards or animal contact areas and would increase the ability of employees to practice good hygiene and effective infection control. If these types of improvements are not feasible in the near future, the shelter should consider installation of several hand sanitizer stations throughout all areas of the facility. Signs instructing employees to wash hands after using the restroom before returning to work are also helpful in promoting hygiene.

E. Lighting: The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "indoor housing facilities for dogs and cats shall have ample light, by natural or artificial means, or both, of good quality and well distributed. Such lighting shall provide uniformly distributed illumination of sufficient light intensity to permit routine inspection and cleaning during the entire working period." The inspector noted that lighting could be improved in some areas of the facility, especially in the euthanasia room. Although the euthanasia facility is not a housing facility, poor lighting in the euthanasia room could result in accidental needle sticks to

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employees with hazardous substances and also could result in difficulties properly administering euthanasia solutions.

F. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "shelter shall be provided for all dogs and cats kept outdoors when atmospheric temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit." Despite exterior canvas drapes, doghouses, and blankets distributed in cold weather, the outdoor unheated portion of the housing area (screening shelter and shelter for un-adoptable dogs) may sometimes expose animals to temperatures less than 50 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the threshold below which the statutes suggest additional protection from the cold. A heating system of some type would greatly improve conditions at the facility and protect animals more thoroughly from the elements.

G. Primary enclosures: Louisiana law states that "primary enclosures shall be structurally sound and maintained in good repair to protect dogs and cats from injury, to contain them, and to keep predators out," and "constructed and maintained so as to enable the dogs and cats to remain dry and clean." Some of the smaller primary enclosures for housing small dogs and puppies are not in good repair. Severe rusting of caging is apparent. LAWC recommends that these cages be replaced with stainless steel or fiberglass cages that are impervious to substrates that promote microbial growth and potential transmission of diseases.

H. The Louisiana State Sanitary Code (Title 51, Part III, Chapter 1 of the Louisiana Administrative Code) states, "No person shall own, keep or have in his custody a dog, cat, or ferret over three months of age that has not been vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian. Every owner of a dog, cat, or ferret shall cause said animal to be vaccinated initially with a series of two vaccinations, the first to be administered at three months of age, the second to be administered one year after the initial vaccination. Dogs, cats, or ferrets initially vaccinated later than three months of age shall also be administered a series of two vaccines, the second vaccine to be given one year after the initial vaccination. Subsequent booster vaccines shall be administered one year after the administration of a vaccine that confers one year of immunity and three years after the administration of a vaccine that confers three years of immunity. Approved vaccines and durations of immunity are listed in the most recent *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control* prepared by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc." Although this shelter mandates that all animals adopted from the facility are neutered or spayed, the shelter does nothing to ensure that adopted animals are vaccinated for rabies. It is nearly a universal policy of all public shelters to ensure compliance with rabies laws. Most shelters originally came into existence as part of a nationwide initiative to decrease the number of incident cases of rabies virus infection in humans. In fact, animal control and pet vaccine requirements have been successful in reducing the incidence of human rabies in the United States to an average of one or two cases per year, although nothing about the epidemiology of the disease in nature has changed. Terrestrial and bat variants of rabies virus circulate within Ouachita Parish and surrounding areas and pose a danger to all warm blooded animals in the area, including pets and humans. The presence of a rabid dog, cat, or ferret in populated areas is considered a public health emergency. Studies have demonstrated that compliance with vaccine requirements for pets in some areas of Louisiana is woefully inadequate. A primary part of the mission of any animal control shelter is rabies control and prevention. Louisiana OPH implores shelters in the state to ensure vaccine compliance in adopted pets. Several methods are employed by shelters to ensure rabies vaccination compliance in adopted animals. LAWC and OPH are available for consultation to suggest accepted methods.

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II. Adoption of the following practices should serve to improve the public image of the facility, enhance health and safety of the animals and workers, and/or decrease the likelihood of legal incidents and public complaints.

Suggestions by LAWC to improve shelter management:

A. The shelter director or kennel manager approves the animals that are to be euthanized based on his or her observations. This process is documented in writing in the form of a standard shelter policy. Written approvals with justification (reasons) for euthanasia should be recorded for review. LAWC recommends a formal "two-tiered" procedure for approval of euthanasia be adopted, whereby the decision to euthanize animals must be approved or attested to by a combination of two of the following personnel: shelter director, kennel manager, animal control officer, veterinarian, city official. The second official could attest to the euthanasia procedures after the fact, considering the small size of the shelter staff.

B. The lack of a dedicated observation and/or isolation ward may result in euthanasia of animals that, if suffering from a minor illness, could be separated, treated, and later offered for adoption. The small physical plant does not appear to foster the development of such a facility or enclosure. Again, future improvements to the physical plant should include planning for isolation of new intakes and animals that may suffer from minor health conditions. A larger facility that could facilitate a true isolation ward might result in a decrease in euthanasia procedures and a decreased potential for introduction of diseases that may result in a reduced adoptable population.

C. A written plan for supply management and dedicated areas for storage, separate from animal wards, would be helpful. Storage areas in the facility were observed, in some instances, to be untidy and haphazardly arranged. LAWC recommends that management finalize and publish written policies for storage of food and supplies, isolation of animals, and shelter oversight.

Some discrepancies in staff explanations of cleaning and hygiene procedures with written policy were observed. This disagreement may indicate a need to update the written policy on cleaning and serves as a reminder to shelter management to maintain and update documents as policies change.

D. There appears to be a shortage of animal handling surfaces (eg. treatment tables, elevated work surfaces, food prep counters) in animal wards. This deficiency could lead to difficulties in animal handling and may result in injuries to workers.

E. Facilities at the site are older and are filled to near capacity with animals. The absence of an attractive reception facility may negatively affect the public's perception of the quality of the facility and might reduce the facility's capacity to attract individuals capable of adopting pets. This facility serves a large population and improvement or expansion of reception, animal treatment, animal housing, and storage areas would benefit the shelter, animals, and citizens of Ouachita Parish. Management runs an efficient operation under fairly austere circumstances and deserves credit for a job well done. Expansion and improvement of the physical plant would ameliorate many of the deficiencies observed.

F. As is seen in most public shelters in Louisiana, the proportion of animals reclaimed by owners or adopted out is relatively low in comparison to the number of animals taken in. LAWC may be able to assist in suggesting means for improving adoption rates. Several methods may be considered (e.g. increasing and improving adoption programs, utilizing foster care, employing the internet in attempts to better market adoptable animals, weekend hours open to the public, enlarging and improving the facility to improve public perception and accessibility).

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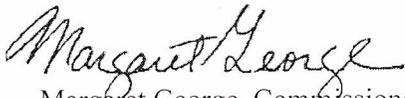
G. LAWC has been introduced to several shelter management software packages. Some of these packages may be available to Louisiana shelters at no cost. LAWC encourages the use of shelter management software packages in Louisiana shelters. Please contact LAWC if interested in learning more about these programs.

This concludes the report. OPH will request the statistics from calendar year 2009 in early January. Please be vigilant for the request.

LAWC wishes to remind parish officials that the commission is very happy to provide advice and expertise pertaining to shelter design and function, should future plans include expansion, remodeling, or construction of new facilities.

Thanks again to the Ouachita Parish Animal Shelter and its staff for cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelters' dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission


Margaret George, Commissioner

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