



State of Louisiana
Animal Welfare Commission

Office of the Governor

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Report submitted to: Vermilion Parish Animal and Rabies Control Officials and Vermilion Parish Government

Date of Report: August 30, 2009

Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facility located in Kaplan, 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 Vermilion Parish Animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. The shelter provides services to the citizens of Vermilion Parish during regularly scheduled business hours. Emergency contact information is also provided. Fees for services are registered with the parish and have been posted in the facility's reception area. Animal areas are adequately heated and animals are protected from the sun and rain. An attractive, clean public receiving area greets visitors to the shelter. Food storage areas are clean, organized, and well protected from spoilage and/or infestation. Refrigeration for food storage, medical supplies, and carcass disposal appears in good working condition and is sufficient for shelter needs. Sanitation methods in interior and exterior animal wards appear adequate to combat infection, maintain cleanliness, and control odors. Dedicated facilities for euthanasia are present and are separated from other areas of the facility.

Euthanasia methods, as explained to the auditors, are in compliance with recommended techniques and a certified euthanasia technician is present to euthanize each animal when required. Vaccine policies appear to be in line with accepted standards in Louisiana and the shelter participates in the OPH rabies surveillance system.

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:

- Record keeping: According to Louisiana law, records "shall be prepared for every animal that enters the shelter and shall include description of animal; veterinary treatment; length of time held; fees collected; and date euthanized, died, reclaimed or adopted." Monthly summaries of records were presented to the auditors; however these summaries did not

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differentiate the species of animals returned to owners. This may be the result of inadequacy of the query to reflect this data point; however the auditors have requested that future summaries include differentiation by species. The auditors did not investigate the presence of these individual records, and no evaluation of these records was completed.

- 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, no record of a formal system of inspection by any parish official was brought forth. LAWC suggests that the parish establish a regular program of inspection and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors.
- Posting of fees: The fees for shelter services were posted in what appeared to be 12 point font on a document attached to the wall in the shelter public receiving area; however state statute requires that the fees be “visibly” posted. LAWC recommends that the fees be displayed in a manner that is more apparent to shelter visitors. The fees should be displayed in larger font on an appropriate sign or poster.
- Regular program of pest control: The shelter contracts for pest control, however no evidence of a specific rodent control strategy was observed. To fulfill statutory requirements for control of vermin, LAWC reminds the management of the importance of rodent control in any facility that is utilized for the storage of food. Of course the strategy employed for rodent control should be of a type that precludes accidental consumption of rodenticides by any resident animal in or around the facility.
- Waste disposal: Louisiana law states that “disposal facilities shall be so provided and operated as to minimize vermin infestations, odors, and disease hazards.” The auditors discovered cage waste littered with food, urine and fecal material, deposited loosely in the dumpster. Although most of such waste was properly contained in sealed plastic bags, a significant amount was not so contained. Shelter staff should be instructed to seal all such waste in bags before disposal in the dumpster.
- Operating procedures: State statute requires that “dogs shall be separated from cats.” This shelter complies with this requirement and these species of animals were never observed to be housed in the same primary enclosure. To minimize stress to cats and dogs, the staff is encouraged to separate cats and dogs by ward also, possibly keeping the animals in wards with separate ventilation systems; however LAWC recognizes that the construction of the facility may not permit such stringent separation by species.
- 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. Primary enclosures shall be constructed and maintained so as to enable the dogs and cats to remain dry and clean...The floors of primary enclosures shall be constructed so as to protect the dogs’ and cats’ feet and legs from injury.” In almost every instance, this shelter complies with the above requirements. Some minor deficiencies were noted. In the small air conditioned interior ward that houses puppies, kittens, and adult cats, the cages with painted metal mesh doors were characterized by peeling and chipping paint and

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rust. Kennel employees may be unable to adequately clean these surfaces, thus enhancing chances for disease transmission among the animals. LAWC recommends that the cages be replaced or that they be painted and sealed to decrease porosity.

In the auditors examination of the exercise area and pen in the rear of the facility, PVC pipe and other materials were being stored in the exercise pen, indicating that the pen was not used or, if used, presented a potential for injury to dogs in the pen. The materials should be removed from the pen.

One of the wooden cat cages appeared to be unpainted and porous, thus resistant to thorough disinfection. LAWC recommends that, if the cage must be used, that it be painted and adequately sealed to prevent transmission of disease. The shelter only uses these cages for animals destined for euthanasia. However, due to the possibility of late identification and reclamation by an owner, or the possibility of use of the cages for other purposes in times of high population density, LAWC suggests that the goal of the shelter be to remove these cages entirely.

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:

- The main gate to the rear yard of the facility should be closed and secured when not in use (when vehicles are entering or leaving the facility). A sign encouraging employees to close and secure the gate after use would also be helpful. These precautions lessen the likelihood of dog escape and also serve as additional barriers to entry of larger wild animals.
- There is no true isolation ward at the facility. The dog kennels used for rabies observation are also used for regular housing when population numbers are increased, and an adjacent storage room is used to house cats. The auditors did not witness a section of the facility where animals suffering from contagious disease could be easily isolated, without repositioning several animals. The shelter is encouraged to create a separate/dedicated isolation ward.
- Authorization for euthanasia is specified in the parish ordinance as being granted to the "animal control officer." This designation is much too broad. The auditors learned that the animal control shelter director was the person authorized to euthanize animals at the facility. It is the suggestion of LAWC that a protocol with at least two levels of authorization, perhaps the shelter director with the consent of his or her direct supervisor, be written and strictly followed. This does not have to be physical supervision of each procedure, but could be, in the least, written documentation of approval by an additional person in a supervisory role. In other jurisdictions, decisions for euthanasia by single individuals have often been challenged, rightly or wrongly, and can often be difficult to defend.
- Of the four full time employees of the shelter, only one had received formal training in any aspect of animal control. Although LAWC realizes that on the job training is effective, continuing education for shelter employees is strongly encouraged.
- The old carbon monoxide (CO) chamber should be removed from the property as soon as possible. The presence of the defective chamber may give those unfamiliar with the inner workings of the shelter, the impression that use of a defective chamber is continuing.

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- Although CO chambers are authorized by American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) euthanasia guidelines, the shelter management is reminded that the AVMA report also states that inhalant agents, such as CO, “not be used alone in animals less than 16 weeks of age except to induce loss of consciousness...” Another approved method of euthanasia should follow.

- Although Vermilion Parish Animal and Rabies Control abides by parish ordinance 2008-O-37, “An Ordinance Regulating Animal Control in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana”, the animal shelter standards specified in the Louisiana Revised Statutes (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) are not part of the ordinance. Parish government is strongly urged to consider including shelter standards in the parish ordinance.

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

Thanks again to the Vermilion Parish Animal Control and Rabies shelter for its cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelter’s dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission



Mary Lee Oliphant-Wood, Commissioner

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