

Best Management Practices for **Animal Shelters** and **Rescues** in the Province of Alberta



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Preface

This is the second edition of this document. The original document was created by the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) in collaboration with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. The increase in commitment to the human-animal bond has resulted in a rapid expansion of public interest and concern for animals without owners or whose owners find themselves in situation(s) where they are no longer capable of caring for the animals in their custody. One outcome of this enhanced concern has been the development of a large number of organizations and societies dedicated to providing for these animals in the form of animal shelter and animal rescue operations¹.

In the interest of the animals and protection of the public, it is essential that shelter and rescue operations function in a proper manner. In Alberta, animals are protected from distress by the *Animal Protection Act* and Animal Protection Regulation. This legislation defines a number of steps for enforcement of the law when an animal is found, or caused to be, in distress. However, the *Animal Protection Act* and Regulations does not provide operational guidance to organizations wishing to engage in shelter and rescue activities.

This document is intended to be a foundation for establishment of best management practices (BMP) in this regard. While these practices are entirely voluntary at this stage, it is anticipated that broad acceptance of these principles will enhance animal welfare and protect public safety by providing appropriate guidance where desired and pressure for change where necessary.

Acknowledgement

This guideline has been adapted from the Alberta Wildlife Rehabilitators' Association, Minimum Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation, with the permission of that organization. While essentially reflecting the original document, changes have been made to accommodate the different needs of domestic animals versus wildlife, where necessary.

Objectives

- Provide a tool for interpretation of the *Animal Protection Act* in regards to acceptable standards for shelter and rescue operations in Alberta
- Encourage the establishment of minimum standards for sheltering and rescuing domestic animals in Alberta
- Enable the public and agencies to assess the legitimacy and competence of an operation
- To assist all shelter and rescue centers to adopt minimum animal care standards for operating shelters/rescues
- Provide a base line for the public of the credibility of organizations that they wish to contribute/donate their money or time
- Provide a mechanism to facilitate various organizations to differentiate themselves from other similar operations
- Provide a basis of knowledge to the public so they can make an informed decision when they wish to adopt a pet from a shelter or rescue organization
- Provide a platform for assessment by veterinary practitioners when they are asked to contribute veterinary services to animals presented by shelter or rescue organizations
- Provide recommendations for canine importation



¹ For the purposes of this document, animal shelter and rescue operations are defined as organizations, groups of people or individuals, that have a primary purpose of caring for animals in need.

Core Ethical Principles for any Organization or Individuals Offering Shelter or Rescue Services

A shelter/rescue operator:

- Has financial capacity to provide animal care (including food and veterinary care)
- Strives to achieve high standards of animal care
- Has education and training in animal care
- Is responsible, conscientious and dedicated
- Maintains accurate up-to-date records (for animals within their care)
- Works within all municipal, provincial and national legislation and guidelines with regards to animal care
- Establishes good, safe work habits within the guidelines of current health and safety practices
- Has documented access to appropriate veterinary care and seeks professional treatment when required
- Encourages community support and involvement
- Exists to help animals in need and not as a commercial enterprise for the purpose of breeding, acquiring or selling animals
- Employs educational programs as a means of preventing animal abandonment, distress or abuse
- Shares skills and knowledge with others
- Follows established operating procedures and plans aimed at optimizing the health, safety and welfare of animals under their care
- Has a training program for staff, volunteers and foster homes



General Requirements

In order to achieve consistent and acceptable care for animals in the custody of recognized shelter/rescue organizations a range of standards need to be considered. These include, but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Guidelines for receiving animals into care of a shelter/rescue organization
- Minimum space requirements for various species and breeds
- Standards for housing design that accommodates for animal health and safety by reducing stress, encouraging/allowing natural behaviour and preventing and controlling disease (biosecurity)
- Isolation facilities
- Adequate infection control and disease prevention standards to eliminate transmission of disease to: other animals in a facility, other animals in the external community, facility staff² and the public at large
- Adequate standards for daily animal husbandry including exercise, feeding and watering
- Adequate record keeping standards
- Standards for evaluating an animal's fitness for adoption or return to the care of an individual outside of the center
- Standards for evaluating the suitability of an individual to receive an animal from the care of a center
- Standards for humane euthanasia
- Standards for the disposal of animal and biological waste material

² Staff includes paid employees and volunteers within the context of this document

Best Management Practices

- The animal receiving area must:
 - ✓ Be neat, sanitary and well organized
 - ✓ Be designed so that resident animals are not subject to stress during the intake of new animals
 - ✓ Have sound and activity levels optimized to reduce stress on animals
 - ✓ Have written procedures for the receiving of animals, which staff and volunteers can readily access
- The facility must have written documentation of daily, weekly and seasonal cleaning schedules for both the animal holding facilities and the entire premises
- The facility must be in good repair and there must be written documentation of a continuing program for upkeep
- A facility operations manual should be available to staff and volunteers, which includes:
 - ✓ Policies and procedures that meet or exceed the requirements in these standards
 - ✓ Policies and procedures needed to assist and educate the public in: humanely preventing or reducing unwanted pets, responsible pet ownership and other appropriate information
 - ✓ Safe handling, restraint and transport of animals so as to minimize risk of injury to animals and to humans
 - ✓ Policies and procedures for daily operation of the facility and caring for the animals
 - ✓ Training materials for staff and volunteers
 - ✓ Information on the services provided to the public by the facility
 - ✓ Work place safety information and instruction
- Operators of shelter/rescue facilities must be familiar with the *Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Act, Regulations and Code*. Some safety items that must be available include:
 - ✓ Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - ✓ A first aid kit
 - ✓ A smoke and fire detector
 - ✓ A fire extinguisher
 - ✓ Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for all products requiring them
 - ✓ Emergency contact information
- People handling animals must be trained in safe handling procedures and know how to use the equipment in the facility
- Housing, handling and restraint procedures must be safe for animals and humans
- All facility equipment must be accessible and in good working order
- Each facility must provide a designated area(s) in which staff and volunteers can eat and drink etc. and all such activities must be restricted to these areas
- Each facility should have an exit strategy in case of financial concerns, inadequate volunteers, disease outbreak, etc., including care of animals



Animal Acquisition

- All animals taken into custody by a shelter or rescue operation must be done so in a legal and ethical manner
- Animals may be delivered by a peace officer under the *Animal Protection Act* who designates the operation as a caretaker
- Animals may be surrendered to a shelter or rescue organization by a legitimate owner who is a member of the public
- Animals may be received from other shelter/rescue operations who are in lawful custody of the animal
- Stray animals may only be received from a peace officer in accordance with the *Animal Protection Act* or under authority of an applicable municipal bylaw
- Acquisition of animals strictly for the purpose of resale should not occur
- Shelter/rescue operations must not act in support of or facilitate indiscriminate animal breeding
- Health risks must be considered when animals are imported (see pages 9, 10)

*Animals should not be acquired from any source simply for the purpose of resale.
Legitimate shelter/rescue operations must not act in support of or as
a cover for puppy mills or indiscriminate animal breeding.*

Training

- At least one person in the rescue/shelter facility must have significant training in the field of animal care and facility operation
- Each shelter/rescue facility must provide appropriate training for all staff and volunteers which includes:
 - ✓ Safe handling of all animal species dealt with by the facility
 - ✓ Procedures for receiving animals
 - ✓ Record keeping
 - ✓ Biosecurity and cleaning procedures and schedules

Recording and Reporting Requirements

- Each animal must be tracked from its admission to a shelter/rescue facility until its disposition. This information must include:
 - ✓ Presenter information (name, address, phone, etc)
 - ✓ Date and location animal found if the animal is not the property of the presenter
 - ✓ Full description of the animal; species, breed, color size, gender, weight, etc.
 - ✓ Any identification at presentation; tattoo, tag/collar, microchip or a verification that identification is not present
 - ✓ Any presenting history available about the animals situation or past events; injuries, temperament, human biting incidents, medical information
 - ✓ Identification added during stay at shelter; microchip, tattoo
 - ✓ Health and medical history during stay in shelter; surgery, diagnostic tests, illnesses, vaccinations, temperament assessment etc.
 - ✓ Final disposition; returned to owner, adopted, fostered, died, euthanized
- Each facility must keep records of its current inventory of animals under care
- Each facility must keep records of its annual and ongoing activities including:
 - ✓ Annual report of numbers of animals sheltered or rescued
 - ✓ Appropriate demographic information of animal intake
 - ✓ Annual report of the disposition of animals under its care



Transportation

- Shipping crates, cages, trailers or vehicles must be designed so as to restrict movement and to prevent injury to animal
- Floor areas must be provided with a covering that will prevent the animal from slipping during transport
- Proper ventilation must be provided and travel times must be optimized to minimize stress
- Food and water containers or any other loose items must be removed from, or secured to the crate or cage while the animal is being transported
- All transport equipment must be constructed so as to be easily cleaned and sanitized
- Animals must not be left unattended in motor vehicles due to risk of extreme temperatures

Feeding

- Animals must be fed a diet appropriate for their species, age and physiological condition
- Clean fresh water must be readily available
- Food must be prepared and stored under sanitary conditions and perishable prepared food must be dated and refrigerated where necessary



Medical Care

- The facility must have a documented veterinary-client-patient relationship regarding the medical care of all animals. One or more licensed veterinarians must be designated as a facility veterinarian
- All veterinary activity must be compliant with legislation and regulation governing the practice of veterinary medicine in the province
- Adequate medical supplies should be available, including disinfectants, cleansing agents and restraint equipment
- If prescription medications are necessary and are to be administered by the facility staff, the veterinarian needs to provide a prescription detailing: the drug, dosage, written directions for proper administration, duration of treatment and safe storage. The veterinarian must provide written specific direction for the facility staff to provide treatment for a specified animal or group of animals.
- Access to pathology services, surgery, radiology, diagnostics etc. must be available either through a community based veterinary practice or an in house veterinary practice entity that has been certified by the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association



Infection Prevention and Control (Biosecurity)

A documented protocol, developed with a facility veterinarian, must be in place to prevent spread of disease from animals to human, and between animals, both within the facility and in the community at large.

Preventing Animal to Human Transmission

- Clothing must be unsoiled and changed as often as necessary. Protective outerwear, such as lab coats or coveralls is preferable
- Shoes and boots must be kept clean of fecal matter, dirt and cage litter
- Disposable gloves and surgical masks must be available and used during procedures where contamination may be present
- Lavatory facilities must be accessible with hand washing sinks, suitable liquid washing agents in pump bottles (not soap bars) and disposable drying articles (not cloth towels)
- Eating and drinking must be restricted to designated areas which are free of animals and waste materials
- Supervisory staff must be given basic information on diseases transmissible between humans and animals (zoonoses) and other transmissible diseases
- All staff and volunteers should discuss any relevant medical concerns and recommended vaccinations with their personal physician prior to working in the facility. Tetanus and rabies are commonly recommended vaccinations
- There must be separate refrigeration facilities for each of the following: animal food; specimens/lab samples; human food; animal carcasses

Preventing Animal to Animal Transmission

- Animal contact with fecal matter or discarded food materials must be minimized
- Animal enclosures must be kept sanitary by having an adequate and routine cleaning schedule
- Indoor facilities must have adequate ventilation and air movement with minimal recycled or reused air
- Animals confirmed or suspected of having contagious diseases must be kept isolated in a separate room and kept away from non-infected susceptible animals
- Animals of unknown health status must be kept isolated in a different room for an appropriate time or until freedom from disease can be confirmed (quarantine)
- An examination for external parasites must be performed
- On entry, animals should be dewormed at least three times - two weeks apart with a product effective against roundworms and tapeworms
- A program of vaccination, developed with the facility veterinarian, must be in place and be designed to consider the special needs of animals on admission and prior to return to the general community
- Bowls, feeding utensils, medical equipment, linens used for handling animals and for animal bedding, and gloves worn while handling animals must be cleaned/replaced daily and disinfected between use on different animals
- Animal diets must be prepared under sanitary conditions minimizing the threat of microbial contamination. Food must be stored in containers and areas free from all possible contaminants, rodents and pests. Raw food diets should not be fed



Protecting Public Health

- All organic refuse must be collected into airtight bags or containers and stored in a secure, animal proof location until removed from the premises
- Privately owned animals that may cause stress or disease concern must not be allowed into the areas of the facility where sheltered animals are housed
- A program of rodent and insect control must be in place with occupant (animal and human) safety taken into consideration
- Waste must be disposed of in accordance with all government regulations



Requirements for Housing

General Cage Requirements

General Cage requirements apply to cages, stalls, runs, pens or any other areas where animals are confined.

- Must be an appropriate size for the animal, protect the animal from injury, abuse, or harassment, and contain furnishings appropriate to the age and species being housed, and predator proof where necessary
- Must be strong and constructed of material that can be easily cleaned and disinfected with adequate drainage
- Must be maintained in good repair
- Must be escape proof
- Must provide sufficient shelter from the sun, wind, rain, snow, or excessive cold or heat
- Must provide ample room to move about freely and to lie and to sit comfortably unless restrained for medical reasons
- Must have an adequate supply of potable water

- Must be constructed to avoid disease transmission between cages/runs
- Must be appropriately ventilated to allow air movement
- Must have fresh water available and on a schedule appropriate to the species and condition
- Substrates must consist of materials that can be regularly cleaned or changed

Outdoor Cages

- Must provide opportunity for exercise, behavioural rehabilitation and acclimatization to weather conditions
- Must have a double door entry system
- Must have no visual barriers that cause a risk to staff
- Must provide shelter from adverse weather
- Must be designed to insure animal and human safety
- Must have fresh water available
- Must provide visual barriers or hiding places that screen animals from human disturbance and/or viewing

Indoor Cages

- Must be clean and sanitary
- Must be located in an area that is quiet and has minimal visual stimuli, to minimize stress
- Must have capacity for visual screening from people and have adequate separation from potentially antagonistic or threatening animals
- Must have reasonable natural sunlight and/or daylight exposure, or where natural light is not available, have a combination of UVB, UVA, visible light and/or infrared lighting with a time regime appropriate to the season and species



Fostering

Before an animal is released from a shelter/rescue facility to a foster home, the following conditions must be met:

- Written protocols and assessment to establish criteria to judge if the animal is of suitable health and temperament to be released to a foster home

Adopting

Before an animal is released from a rescue/shelter facility to the adoptive home, the following conditions must be met:

- Written protocols and assessment to establish criteria to judge if the animal is of suitable health and temperament to be released for adoption
- The animal must be permanently identified by a traceable tattoo or microchip. In species where this is inappropriate, other identification means must be employed
- The animal must be sterilized (spayed or neutered) or dependable arrangements must be confirmed so that these procedures will be performed prior to any possibility of reproduction
- Appropriate vaccinations must have been administered and arrangements made for the necessary booster immunizations
- An assessment of the new owner must be made to determine their ability to appropriately care for animals in general and the new animal specifically
- An assessment must be made of the appropriateness of the specific animal to the specific owner
- Any animal posing a threat to the public or other animals should not be released



Releasing a domestic animal of any species into the wild or into an unattended environment is unacceptable.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia³ may be required where there is no suitable alternative to alleviating an animal's suffering or when an animal is unsuitable for adoption due to illness, injury, temperament or lack of suitable living situation.

- Euthanasia must be reliable, simple, safe and rapid
- Euthanasia must only take place upon the advice of the facility veterinarian, and in accordance with the euthanasia protocol established by the facility, in consultation with the veterinarian
- Methods of euthanasia employed must follow accepted practices as defined by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) or the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC)
- Lethal injection is considered the most acceptable form of euthanasia for individual animals. Alternate approved methods of euthanasia may need to be employed when lethal injection is not feasible
- Lethal injection must be performed by the facility registered veterinarian or registered veterinary technologist, under the direction of the veterinarian and in accordance with provincial and federal legislation governing the practice of veterinary medicine and the use of controlled substances

³ *Euthanasia: the induction of death with minimal pain, stress or anxiety, or the humane ending of an animal's life.*

Recommendations on Canine Importation

In recent years, it has become popular to own a 'rescue dog'. This has increased the movement of dogs across Canada and from other countries. Some dogs that appear to come from the United States have already made a long journey from another country. There is currently no monitoring and minimal control of companion animal movement into and within Canada.

In 2016 the Report of the Canadian Canine Importation Working Group was released by the Canadian Council of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCVO) after widespread concern about movement of companion animals into Canada being associated with disease risk to Canadian people and pets. The report offers strategies to mitigate the risks to domestic animals, wildlife and the public posed when dogs are imported across regional, provincial and international borders. Promoting 'adopt local' is one option. The majority of dog importers are trying to 'do the right thing' but are often simply unaware of the problems.

The following diseases of concern were identified when importing dogs into Canada:

- Alveolar echinococcosis
- Brucellosis
- Canine heartworm
- Canine influenza
- Canine lungworm
- Leishmaniasis
- Rabies
- Screwworm (minor risk)
- Tick-borne diseases



This list is not exhaustive and other diseases such as canine distemper and leptospirosis have also been reported in imported dogs. In order to reduce the potential of transmission of the above list of diseases, as well any other thus far unidentified issues, and to have some traceability of the imported animals after the initial adoption period, the following measures are recommended:

✓ Microchipping

It is vitally important that animals being imported are able to be traced and verified as having received required treatments. To this end, it is imperative that all animals imported be permanently identified through the use of a microchip. This will facilitate proving ownership of the animal (and therefore who is responsible for any costs incurred), identifying that this animal is the one which received vaccinations, deworming, etc., and a method of tracking this animal should questions arise after importation.

✓ Health Certificate

An official health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian registered with the appropriate authority in the country of origin which documents an examination for health, vaccines, parasite treatments administered, tests completed, dates, and results should be obtained. Entry can be refused if any signs of illness are suspected (e.g. respiratory illness for Canine influenza).

✓ Rabies Testing

Rabies, because of its zoonotic potential, is a disease for which many countries want proof of vaccination prior to importation. Owned dogs and cats over 3 months of age require a current rabies vaccination certificate to enter Canada. Best practice is that the vaccination is given no less than 30 days prior to importation so ideally puppies must be at least 4 months old to be imported. Alternatively, the puppy could be quarantined by the new owner in Canada until 4 months old. It is recommended that all dogs have a rabies titre level of 0.5 IU/mL measured at a recognized lab prior to entry. This will ensure that the dog in question has been vaccinated (no false documentation) and that the immune response is sufficient.

✓ Parasite Treatment

A number of the above-mentioned diseases can be considerably decreased in prevalence by using readily available antiparasitics. Treating a dog with an appropriate drug for both roundworms and tapeworms twice (at 30 days and 4 days) prior to importation should ensure most parasites are eliminated prior to importation. Flea and tick treatment should be completed twice at 30 days and 1 day prior to importation, and an official veterinarian examination for ectoparasites be done within 2 days of shipping.

Also, it is recommended that dogs be treated for lungworm shortly before or after importation, particularly for dogs from high-risk areas (e.g. Maritimes). Dogs should be screened for exposure to *Leishmania* prior to importation. Positive dogs require life-long treatment making them a disease risk but also poor candidates for adoption.

✓ Heartworm Testing

It is recommended all dogs are tested for Heartworm infection before and after importation.

✓ Brucella Testing

Although the prevalence is low, the zoonotic potential and the immense risk to breeding stock (rendering them sterile) means that all intact animals over 6 months of age should be screened for Brucellosis no later than 16 days prior to importation. Altered animals are much less of a concern as are those under 6 months of age.

✓ Quarantine

Quarantine of imported dogs is a responsible step in decreasing the incidence of infection of Canadian pets. For instance, quarantine of a dog for 48–96 hours will identify dogs incubating Canine Influenza. If clinical systems develop during that initial quarantine, the quarantine should be lengthened in consultation with the veterinarian. Quarantine should be a minimum of 10 days long in consideration of the most commonly seen diseases.





Additional Resources

Biosecurity in Practice, Alberta Veterinary Medical Association;
<https://abvma.in1touch.org/site/pracresources/biosecurity?nav=member>

A Code of Practice for Canadian Kennel Operations; Canadian Veterinary Medical Association; 2018,
www.canadianveterinarians.net

A Code of Practice for Canadian Cattery Operations; Canadian Veterinary Medical Association; 2009,
www.canadianveterinarians.net

Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters; Association of Shelter Veterinarians; 2010,
www.sheltervet.org

Report of the Canadian Canine Importation Working Group; 2016,
www.canadianveterinarians.net

Importation of Dogs into Canada - Position Statement
www.canadianveterinarians.net