

# DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES

## POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

### A.62

**SUBJECT: EUTHANASIA REDUCTION PROGRAM**

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#### A.62.1 BACKGROUND

The word “euthanasia” means the intentional causing of a painless and merciful death. Animal sheltering agencies have a mandate to provide a humane death for those animals whose lives must be ended. These include animals that are fractious to people or animals, or animals that are suffering from or afflicted with a medical condition that cannot be rehabilitated with reasonable efforts, and animals whose owners request euthanasia.

The Department is committed to using its best efforts to avoid euthanasia of healthy and reasonably well-adjusted animals, as well as those animals where reasonable medical treatment or behavior modification will enable them to become healthy and socialized pets.

**NOTE:** Related procedures are contained in Department Procedure O.41.

#### A.62.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the state that no adoptable or treatable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home.

Our commitment to responsible sheltering practices requires that we use and document reasonable efforts to place adoptable, treatable, or manageable animals in an adoptive home or with an animal sheltering agency or animal rescue organization.

All applicable Department staff members involved in the euthanasia process are expected to perform this responsibility in a humane and respectful manner with compassion toward the animals.

#### A.62.3 DEFINITIONS

Defining what we mean is an essential part of creating an effective work plan. To be meaningful, definitions must be objective and based solely on an animal’s health and behavior, and not other criteria such as age, color, and length of stay at the shelter, number of similar animals at the shelter or housing space.

By properly documenting the assessment of each animal and accurately categorizing those that are euthanized, the Department can provide the public with

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more complete and accurate information on the disposition of impounded animals, and report euthanasia statistics in context. If an animal must be euthanized it is important to record accurate information, and no attempt should be made to skew data or manipulate statistics.

For the purposes of this policy, and the procedures set forth in Department Procedure O.41, the following terms (and *Outcome Subtypes*) have the following meanings:

**Adoptable** animals are those animals eight weeks of age or older (or, for the purposes of this policy, weaned and eating on their own) that, at or subsequent to, the time the animal is taken into possession, have manifested no sign of a behavioral, or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and have manifested no sign of disease, injury, congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the health of the animal, or that is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future. (Also see Civil Code sec. 1834.4, Food and Agricultural Code sec. 17005, and Penal Code sec. 599d).

“Adoptable” animals are healthy and well socialized, and need no medical attention. They have not manifested a sign of a behavioral or temperamental condition that could pose a safety risk. Animals that may be old, deaf, blind, scarred, or disabled, but are not in any pain, do not require medical treatment, and are healthy, friendly pets, are adoptable. Age, breed and time at the shelter do not affect the definition of “adoptable.”

**Treatable** animals include any animal that is not “adoptable,” but could become “adoptable” with reasonable efforts. (Civil Code sec. 1834.4, Food and Agricultural Code sec. 17005, and Penal Code sec. 599d). “Treatable” animals have a behavioral and/or medical condition that is normally responsive to reasonable treatment or intervention efforts that would enable them to become “adoptable”

To be considered “treatable,” an animal need not be fully rehabilitated within the applicable holding period. It is the reasonableness of the behavior intervention or medical treatment and the likelihood of remediation, rather than the cost or availability of such resources in the shelter environment that is determinative. Reasonable treatment efforts are generally considered the accepted, prevailing,

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usual and customary remedial measure for the particular condition among veterinarians or behavior specialists (as distinguished from unconventional, untried, or experimental procedures).

While cost and availability may be relevant in deciding whether or not an animal should be treated or euthanized, they are not material factors in determining whether an animal is defined as “treatable”. Although saving treatable animals will be limited by budget constraints, such financial considerations do not affect the definition of “treatable.” The decision as to whether an animal is “treatable” depends on the condition of the animal rather than other criteria unrelated to the animal’s health and behavior.

“Treatable” is not synonymous with savable. An animal with a remote chance for recovery, or whose condition would require life long treatment or experimental procedures with uncertain outcomes may be “manageable” or savable, but it is not reasonably “treatable.”

**Manageable animals** are those animals found to have a chronic behavior or medical, congenital or hereditary condition that poses no significant health or safety risk to itself, other animals, or the public and typically requires ongoing reasonable treatment or intervention that enables them to maintain a satisfactory quality of life.

*Note: All unclaimed animals categorized as “adoptable”, “treatable”, or “manageable” are available for adoption.*

**Reasonable efforts** are documented attempts by the Department throughout an animal’s stay to treat or place an adoptable, treatable, or manageable animal. Reasonable treatment efforts are generally considered the accepted, prevailing, usual and customary remedial measure for the particular condition among veterinarians or behavior specialists (as distinguished from unconventional, untried, or experimental procedures). Reasonable placement efforts include documentation of attempts to contact applicable animal rescue organizations.

**Owner request:** Owners may sign a written request to have their animals euthanized for a fee. In general, such animals that have a behavioral or medical condition may be immediately euthanized. An animal that is deemed “adoptable”

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will normally be held and made available for adoption as a relinquished animal (despite the owner's request for euthanasia).

**Behavior-potential safety risk** animals are those (other than those classified as feral or "regulated" animals) that have a documented history of aggressive behavior towards a person or other animal, or that at or subsequent to impoundment have manifested some sign of a behavioral or temperamental condition that could pose a safety risk.

Examples include any animal with a history of biting or attacking a person or other animal, or an animal that demonstrates aggressive behavior towards a person or other animal during a behavior assessment or evaluation.

**Not rehabilitatable:** Animals that are irremediably suffering from a serious illness or severe injuries, have a poor prognosis or protracted painful recovery, or are afflicted with some significant behavioral or medical condition that is not likely to be satisfactorily remedied or managed with reasonable efforts are considered "not rehabilitatable".

Examples of conditions that may necessitate euthanasia include: fading/collapsing kittens, organ failure, feline immunodeficiency, feline infectious peritonitis, a puppy in the advanced stages of parvo, a spinal fracture, cancer, chronic debilitation, certain congenital abnormalities, or any serious, chronic illness with a poor prognosis or that is unresponsive to treatment. A condition that may not necessitate euthanasia on its own, when present in combination with other factors may lead to the decision to euthanize. Quality of life and risk to the health of other animals or people are factors that will be considered in the decision.

**Feral** animals are animals without owner identification of any kind whose usual and consistent temperament is extreme fear and resistance to contact with people. A feral animal is totally unsocialized to people.

**Neonatal** animals are newborns unable to survive without maternal care. These animals may be euthanized if no maternal, foster or rescue care can be given. Attempts to obtain foster or rescue care should be documented and unweaned animals should be held as long as they are not under distress or their stability compromised. (An Outcome Subtype of "Adoptable" [rather than "neonatal"]

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should be entered for healthy weaned kittens and puppies under 8 weeks of age that must be euthanized.)

In general, healthy and social weaned kittens and puppies are considered “Adoptable”, and unweaned kittens and puppies that are healthy or that have some curable medical condition typically responsive to reasonable medical treatment are considered “Neonatal - medically treatable”. Unweaned animals that are euthanized due to irremediable suffering from a serious illness or severe injury should be classified as “Neonatal – Not rehabilitatable.”

**Quarantine:** Euthanasia of an animal for a laboratory (pathological) examination for rabies may be appropriate in certain cases (e.g., for stray, unidentified biter animals held through the required holding period, or where the Quarantine period has not expired, and the laboratory examination is approved by a Lieutenant).

**Regulated** animals are prohibited or disqualified for adoption by law, regulation, or policy. To promote animal and public health and safety, no “Dangerous Dog” as defined in section 62.601(l) of the County Code should be made available for adoption, whether or not the dog has been declared a “Dangerous Dog” pursuant to section 62.674 of the County Code. Animals that have been declared a “public nuisance”, or that are subject to public nuisance proceedings, should not be made available for adoption without a file review and concurrence of the Regional Director.

**A.62.4 AUTHORITY**

Euthanasia training	CCR Title 16: 2039
Euthanasia methods.	Penal: 597u, v, and w
County provision for euthanasia	Food & Ag: 31105(b)
Purchase of sodium pentobarbital:	B & P: 4840(c)
Severely injured animals in the field	Penal: 597.1(e)
Irremediably suffering animals	Food & Ag: 17006

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Veterinary practice exception B & P: 4827(d)

Establishment of humane euthanasia procedure. SDCC: 62.631

**HOLDING PERIODS**

Dogs; release of specified dogs to nonprofit groups Food & Ag: 31108

Cats; release of specified cats to nonprofit groups Food & Ag: 31752; 31752.5

Specified animals. Food & Ag: 31753

Relinquished animals; dangerous dogs: Food & Ag: 31754; 31108.5

Neglected animals. Penal: 597.1(h), (i)

Holding periods: SDCC 62.680