

HSUS Guidelines for the Operation of an Animal Shelter

Your local animal shelter is the nucleus of your community's animal care and control program. The shelter should be maintained and operated so that it is attractive and convenient to the community. Most importantly, it should be a place of safety and comfort for the animals. If you are building a new facility, these considerations should be included in your plan.

In addition to the guidelines that follow, information on shelter design and construction is available from The HSUS. It includes guidelines for evaluating the facility needs of your community, sample floor plans, and a list of architects who specialize in shelter design and have worked on a wide range of animal shelter projects around the country.

The HSUS recommends the standards outlined below for any animal shelter, regardless of its size, years in operation, or budget.

I. Planning Your Facility

A. Housing

1. Stress reduction and disease control are your goals when determining how to separate animals.
2. Separate animals as follows:
 - a.* dogs from cats
 - b.* sick or injured animals from healthy animals
 - c.* puppies and kittens from adult animals (unless the puppies and kittens are nursing)
 - d.* males from females (especially those in season)
 - e.* Aggressive animals from all others
 - f.* nursing mothers and their young from all others
3. Animals who are stressed or recuperating from injuries or illness must have a quiet place to rest during their recovery period. If kept awake, stressed, or forced to be on guard because of close proximity to barking dogs, their recovery period may be lengthened or otherwise compromised.

B. Floors

1. Floors should slope toward drains to prevent the accumulation of water in the runs.
2. Floors should be made of concrete that has been sealed (making it nonporous) or some other nonporous material that can be disinfected.

C. Walls

1. Walls between kennels should be at least 4 feet high and should prevent water and waste material from flowing from kennel to kennel.

2. For walls between kennels, use one of the following materials:
 - a.* cinder block, sealed and painted with epoxy to make it nonporous
 - b.* metal embedded in a concrete base
 - c.* a fiberglass kennel unit, including floor, sides, and gate
 - d.* tile or glass block
3. Chain-link fencing or wire mesh should extend at least 2 feet above kennel walls. Runs should be covered with fence fabric or wire mesh to contain dogs who might jump or climb fences or who are in season, are aggressive, or are quarantined.

D. Drainage

1. The shelter must have drainage and plumbing adequate to handle the heavy load of daily cleaning.
2. Drainage for each run should prevent cross-contamination of other runs by urine or feces.

E. Heating and Cooling

1. Heating elements embedded in kennel floors are ideal. The temperature at floor level for infant, sick, or injured animals should be at least 75°F; for healthy adult animals, 65-70°F;.
2. Heating, cooling, and humidity-control systems should be used for the comfort of the animals, the staff, and the visiting public.
3. A means of circulating the air must be in operation in all kennel areas. Ideally, the air in the building should be exchanged with outside air eight to twelve times per hour.

F. Security

1. Install a security system to protect the building. Some examples are perimeter fencing, an alarm system, or at a minimum, deadbolt locks for all outside runs in combination with outside lighting.
2. Secure all controlled drugs in a manner that, at a minimum, meets both federal and state laws and regulations.
3. Install a fire-alarm system and institute an emergency plan to prepare your staff for a potential evacuation of animals from the shelter.

G. Dogs

1. Dogs confined in either cages or kennels should have room to move about normally.
2. Stainless-steel or custom-made individual cages for indoor holding should follow these minimum size guidelines:

- a.* large dogs (more than 50 pounds): at least 4 feet by 6 feet, or 24 square feet
 - b.* medium-sized dogs (36-50 pounds): at least 4 feet by 5 feet, or 20 square feet
 - c.* small dogs (10-35 pounds): at least 3 feet by 4 feet, or 12 square feet
3. Dogs confined in cages should be exercised in runs at least 4 feet by 10 feet twice daily or walked on a leash for at least 20 minutes twice daily.
4. Kennels with runs, whether fully enclosed or indoor/outdoor, should follow these minimum size guidelines:
 - a.* kennels—4 feet by 6 feet
 - b.* runs—4 feet by 8 feet
5. Ideally, each dog should have his or her own kennel. Animals who share kennels must be evaluated for compatibility and monitored closely. Each should have ample room to stand, lie down, turn around, and sit normally. This requires a minimum area of 4 feet by 4 feet for each dog. A shared 5-foot by 10-foot kennel should hold no more than two large, two medium, or three small dogs.
6. Enclosures should be equipped as follows:
 - a.* Potable water must be available at all times. Water containers should be cleaned and disinfected regularly (and always before a new animal is put into the cage or run). Water containers should be mounted so that animals cannot tip them over or urinate in them.
 - b.* If self-feeders are used, they should be cleaned daily and disinfected regularly (particularly before a new animal is put into the cage or run). In addition, they must be mounted so that dogs cannot urinate or defecate in them. Food should be clean and dry at all times.
 - c.* If kennel floors are not heated, provide resting boards or beds. Even with heated floors, beds should be provided for nursing mothers, injured animals, sick animals, and animals being held for an unusually long time (for example, in cruelty cases). Cardboard boxes and other enclosures or platforms that can be disposed of, changed, or easily disinfected may be used, and blankets or towels that can be disinfected may be used for bedding.

H. Cats

1. Individual cages should be made of stainless steel, fiberglass, or other impervious material and should follow these guidelines:
 - a.* Provide an area of at least 9 square feet (usually 3 feet by 3 feet) for each cat.
 - b.* Supply each cage with a cat litter pan.
 - c.* Ensure that each cat has constant access to water and dry food.
 - d.* House no more than one cat in a cage, except for nursing mothers, young litters of kittens, or pairs of adult cats who have been admitted to the shelter from the same household.

2. If colony cages are used to house cats, follow the guidelines listed below.
 - a.* Cats whose vaccination history is unknown should be evaluated for health and behavior, vaccinated, and isolated for at least 24 hours for observation before being placed in cat-colony cage rooms.
 - b.* Separate unsterilized males from females.
 - c.* Separate nursing mothers from all others.
 - d.* Separate young kittens from adult cats (except for their mothers).
 - e.* House no more than fifteen adult cats or twenty kittens in a 10-by-15-foot room.
 - f.* Include one 12-inch by 18-inch cat litter pan for every three cats or five kittens.
 - g.* Have water and dry food available at all times (when giving fresh food, use one dish per cat).
 - h.* Equip colony rooms with shelves or resting boxes; provide cages with open doors for animals who prefer to be isolated.

I. Human Traffic Control

1. Provide adequate space for staff to work comfortably and for equipment and records to be stored properly.
2. Make the receiving area large enough for the public to bring, reclaim, or adopt animals comfortably and to keep the animals separated from one another. Ideally, incoming animals should be received in an area separate from the adoption area. The traffic flow pattern should be designed so that animals can be moved quickly, safely, and easily from one place to another.
3. Keep newly arrived animals in a receiving room separate from the rest of the shelter population until they have been evaluated for health and temperament. To maintain high standards of safety for the staff and public and to decrease the possibility of the spread of disease, newly arrived animals should be routed to the appropriate holding area as soon as possible: move dangerous dogs to an area away from public access, sick animals to an isolation area, and injured animals to a veterinarian.
4. The euthanasia room and dead-animal storage area should be easily accessible from the kennel area; however, this area should be away from public view. Animal control vehicles should have access to the back of the kennel area for bringing in animals and removing dead animals.
5. The facility should be accessible to disabled persons. The HSUS recommends that all shelters comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), regardless of whether they are mandated to do so under the law.

II. Caring for the Animals

A. Diet and Feeding

All shelter animals, regardless of their term of residence, should receive a good-quality, balanced diet that is appropriate for their life stage. Select a food produced by a company that guarantees complete and balanced nutrition. To meet animals' needs, The HSUS recommends the following:

1. The shelter should have a sufficient number of adequately sized stainless steel food and water bowls to accommodate all animals. Feed puppies and kittens who are six to twelve weeks of age three times a day. Feed puppies and kittens who are twelve weeks to twelve months of age twice a day, and adults at least once a day.
2. Dry food can be made palatable to the greatest number of dogs as follows: Mix one-half can of wet food with one pound of dry dog food for each adult dog, add enough warm water to mix well, mix, and feed. If animals are fed between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., their stools can be removed before closing and the dogs will be in clean runs overnight. Dry puppy food must be moistened for young pups.
3. Dry puppy chow and adult dog food may be left in self-feeders.
4. Feed dogs and puppies enough food to meet their nutritional needs (based on such factors as body weight and label instructions). Check food bowls after approximately 20 minutes. If an animal has eaten all her food, place an additional small amount of food in the run or cage.
5. Feed cats and kittens dry or canned cat food. Do not feed dog food to cats (or vice versa).
6. Generic pet foods are not recommended. Often, the nutrients in generic pet foods are not readily available for digestion and absorption by an animal. Recent tests have shown that puppies and kittens who were fed generic pet foods had a greater incidence of illness, improper growth, and other physical abnormalities and required one-and-one-third times as much food per pound of weight gained. Use only products that are made by major national pet-food companies and are 100 percent nutritionally complete.
7. Store all food in air-tight plastic containers to prevent spoilage and to avoid attracting rodents and insects.

B. Disease Control

Follow these guidelines to minimize disease:

1. Evaluate all animals shortly after they come in to the shelter and observe them during their entire stay. Here are some common signs of illness in dogs and cats that may warrant veterinary care:
 - a.* Eyes are watery, appear swollen, or show discharge.
 - b.* Ears appear red or inflamed, show discharge, or have a foul odor.
 - c.* Nose shows discharge (mucous, blood, or pus), or is crusty, congested, or blocked.

- d.* Gums are swollen or inflamed, teeth are loose or brown, or mouth has a foul odor.
 - e.* Animal is sneezing, coughing, or wheezing.
 - f.* Animal has fleas or ticks, skin shows swelling or lesions, animal limps, or animal is thin or obese.
 - g.* Animal has wounds or abscesses, or body temperature is abnormal.
2. Have a trained and experienced staff member, a veterinary technician, or a veterinarian available to check animals and to provide care. Instruct every staff member to note and record all symptoms of possible illness and to bring them to a supervisor's attention.

C. Cleaning

1. All kennels, cages, and runs must be cleaned daily with hot water and a broad-spectrum disinfectant proven to be effective against various bacteria and viruses common in a shelter environment (including distemper and parvovirus). Each enclosure should be cleaned, scrubbed, and disinfected BEFORE a new animal enters. As an alternative, chlorine bleach (mixed with water in a 1:32 dilution) can be used.
2. Mix disinfectants according to specific manufacturer instructions. After application, allow the disinfectant to remain in contact with the surface for the length of time recommended by the manufacturer before rinsing.
3. Do not expose animals to water or disinfectant. During cleaning, place all animals in separate holding areas or in carriers; animals should never be left in the cage or kennel. Make sure enclosures are completely dry before animals are returned to them.
4. Clean the kennels and cages from floor to ceiling, and scrub cage doors and similar surfaces manually. It is false economy—and a potential source of infection—to clean the walls of a run only to the height of the dog inhabiting the run. If any one section of the shelter is left unsanitized, disease can be easily transmitted.
5. The recommended daily cleaning routine is as follows:
 - a.* Remove the animal from the run or cage and place him in a separate holding area or carrier, then remove bedding, toys, and all food and water containers.
 - b.* Remove all solid waste such as feces and hair. Do not hose solid waste into the drainage system; rinse away only urine with water.
 - c.* Wash enclosures using a high pressure sprayer, steam-cleaning machine, or long-handled, stiff-bristled scrub brush.
 - d.* Using a scrub brush and a solution of detergent/disinfectant, scrub all surfaces within the enclosure including the floor, sides, resting board, top, and gate, according to specific manufacturer instructions.
 - e.* Allow the solution to stand for at least 20 minutes (or the length of time recommended by the manufacturer).

- f.* Thoroughly rinse all surfaces with a steady stream of water (preferably hot).
- g.* Dry the run or cage as completely as possible using a squeegee or rag. If possible, ventilate the area prior to returning animals to it.
- h.* Clean and disinfect beds, toys, food dishes, and water bowls.
- i.* Clean and disinfect cat litter boxes.
- j.* Clean and disinfect the holding area or carrier after each animal has been removed.
- k.* Clean and disinfect the euthanasia room.
- l.* Clean and disinfect other areas used by animals.
- m.* Clean all areas used by the staff and public. Because bacteria can accumulate and lead to disease and odor problems, be sure to regularly clean and disinfect other areas, including the aisles, walls, and ceilings.

D. Euthanasia of Surplus Animals

The HSUS is committed to recommending only those methods of euthanasia that are painless and rapid and—to the fullest extent possible—that minimize fear and apprehension in the animal.

1. Euthanasia should be performed by the best-qualified and most-compassionate staff members, because no method is any better than the people who administer it. The facility should do the following:
 - a.* Provide training for staff and regularly review and evaluate staff proficiency and attitude; and
 - b.* Demonstrate awareness of the extreme stress of the task on those who perform it and make provisions to decrease this stress by all possible means.
2. Euthanasia guidelines are as follows:
 - a.* The HSUS recommends the injection of sodium pentobarbital, prepared specifically for use as a euthanasia product, as the preferred agent for the euthanasia of companion animals. This method, when properly performed, has been found to be the most humane, safest, least stressful, and most professional choice by The HSUS, American Humane Association, National Animal Control Association, and American Veterinary Medical Association. The use of sodium pentobarbital is carefully controlled by federal and state laws and regulations.
 - b.* Carbon monoxide (CO), when in the form of compressed cylinder gas and delivered in a properly manufactured and equipped chamber, is a conditionally acceptable method of euthanasia for some animals. It is unacceptable to use CO for the euthanasia of dogs and cats who are under four months of age, or who are old, sick, or injured.
 - c.* Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is not acceptable for routine use in animal care and control facilities for euthanasia. However, a commercially manufactured chamber using compressed CO₂ may be acceptable for certain wildlife species.

d. The methods that The HSUS considers inhumane, disapproves of, and campaigns against include decompression, nitrous oxide, drowning, decapitation, cervical dislocation, pithing, exsanguination, electrocution, gunshot (excluding properly performed field euthanasia), air embolism, nitrogen flushing, strychnine, chloral hydrate, caffeine, nicotine, magnesium sulphate, potassium chloride, succinylcholine chloride (Sucostrin, U-Tha-Sol, Anectine, Quelicin Chloride, Scoline Chloride), and any combination of pentobarbital with a neuromuscular blocking agent.

3. Animals should be checked carefully.

a. Animals who have been euthanized should be checked to make certain that their vital signs—breathing, heartbeat, and eye reflex—have stopped or that rigor mortis has set in.

b. Dead animals may be disposed of by incineration, burial in a landfill, or another method approved by the community.

III. Record Keeping and Motor Vehicles

A. Record Keeping

1. Paperwork should be prepared for every animal who enters the shelter. Paperwork should include the animal's description and any available information about his background. The records also should include notes on any veterinary or other special care the animal has received and a record of the animal's final disposition.
2. Each record should be numbered and filed so that shelter staff can easily retrieve the information and easily identify animals for adoption, reclamation, or euthanasia.
3. A cage card should accompany each animal throughout her stay at the shelter. The cage card should include the animal's record number, description, and other relevant information such as behavioral characteristics, and observations about health and temperament. Each animal should wear a collar or a collar-tag combination which includes the record number.
4. All animals should be counted at the start and at the end of each day, with the numbers recorded by species in a permanent journal. Each day, these totals should be balanced against the card records. A daily log should be kept to record animals received, adopted, euthanized, or returned to owner. In the records, animals should be classified according to species, sex, and age. (For example, separate adults from those under four months of age.)
5. Receipts for all fees (such as donations, impoundment fees, and adoption fees) should be kept by number and recorded daily, to be balanced against weekly bank deposits. (An inexpensive cash register that can be locked is a good investment.) Daily balances (including incoming and outgoing transactions) should be maintained.

B. Motor Vehicles

1. Each shelter should have an adequate number of vehicles for picking up animals, depending on the size of the community.

2. The vehicle(s) should provide the animals with safety, security, protection from the elements, adequate ventilation, and temperature control. Each animal must have a separate enclosure. Special enclosures should be available for sick or injured animals; these animals require special care and handling as well. There should be a separate compartment for dead animals if a separate vehicle is not available.
3. The vehicles serve as the agency's "field representation" and therefore should be a) clean and well-marked with the agency's name and phone number; b) operated safely at all times; and c) driven courteously.
4. Vehicles should be designed to make it as easy and humane as possible for animals to be loaded and unloaded.
5. Vehicles should be equipped with at least the following animal rescue equipment: dog and cat control poles; a net; leashes; a ladder; wire or fiberglass cages; portable cat carriers; a halter; head-and-tie ropes and slings for livestock; a stretcher; a tool kit; an axe; a shovel; a hammer; a crowbar; a flashlight; dog and cat food; muzzles; humane dog and cat traps; and first aid kits for both people and animals.
6. Vehicle drivers should be trained and prepared to give emergency care to injured or ill animals. Euthanasia should not be administered in the field unless an animal is suffering to such a degree that she is in need of immediate relief by euthanasia. In these cases, the vehicle driver should call a veterinarian to the scene when necessary. The HSUS considers killing by gunshot to be inhumane, except when it is performed properly as a method of field euthanasia in an emergency situation where safe, humane transport of the animal is not possible. A complete report to document the need for euthanasia should be prepared. As part of their job training, drivers should be guided by shelter policies, including guidelines from a veterinarian on how to make field euthanasia decisions.

Prepared by The HSUS's Animal Sheltering Issues staff.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) was founded in 1954 to promote the humane treatment of animals and to foster respect, understanding, and compassion for all creatures. Today its message of care and protection embraces not only the animal kingdom but also Earth and its environment. To achieve its goals, The HSUS works through legal, educational, legislative, and investigative means. The HSUS's efforts in the United States are facilitated by its nine regional offices; its worldwide outreach is supported by its global humane family of organizations.

The HSUS is not an umbrella organization for local humane societies, animal shelters, or other animal care and control agencies, nor does it have any legal or contractual relationships with such organizations. The HSUS publishes guidelines and recommendations for these organizations. For more information on shelter policies and procedures, please contact The HSUS's Animal Sheltering Issues staff.