

# Why We Need Animal Control

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## ABSTRACT

Animal control officers have a demanding and most important job. In this role they are often poorly respected in their own communities. They receive little support except from each other. This paper explains how this state of affairs is truly unfortunate when animal control officers, before all others, hold the key to facilitating the future harmonious integration of pets in society.

## INTRODUCTION

As opposed to asking the questions, "Do we need animal control?" or "Why do we need animal control?", I prefer the positive: "Why we need animal control." It doesn't really matter whether we're in Brisbane, Townsville, Mount Isa or San Antonio, the problems are the same.

We know pets are important for people and their quality of life. A lot of work has been done in this area to help understand the processes involved. Such work has involved animal companions for the handicapped, equestrian therapy, hearing dogs for the hearing impaired, and seeing eye dogs for the visually impaired. Some older folks forced into nursing homes do much better with a critter to pet.

But there are problems as well.

## PROBLEM OVERVIEW

Is the root of the problem stray, straying, abandoned or feral dogs? Or are our concerns of a greater scope? Like perhaps:

- health promotion: Whose health? Man? Dog? or both? We organise zoonotic disease programs to acquaint the citizens with preventable diseases.
- environmental quality: Consider the pollution factor.
- noise pollution: There are many sources - cars attempting to avoid dogs, cats calling other cats, dogs howling for any or no particular reason, people screaming at the animals or perhaps at other people associated with them.
- hazardous wastes: Infectious faeces pose threats to animals and man, such as *Taenia* and salmonellosis.
- surveillance: Would you consider bites a disease? In the United States, dog bites, when considered as a disease, rank second only to sexually transmitted diseases.

## Is our problem really the stray dog?

Usually strays comprise less than 15% of the overall dog population. For all practical purposes we should consider the unowned, unvaccinated, free-roaming dog to be the genuine stray. Is our problem really caused by this kind of dog? I would say no.

I would guess that each of us knows to whom each dog in our own neighbourhood belongs. There are, in fact, very few strays.

How do we reduce pet problems such as zoonoses?

- Promote preventive health care including immunisations, vermifuges.
- Provide adequate advice regarding risks of the loose pet.
- Promote responsible pet ownership.
- Encourage parental supervision and public education.
- Reduce environmental contamination, especially urine and faeces.
- Enforce dog registration and leash laws.

If these factors are considered and their remedial potential understood, things like surgical sterilisation clinics cease to be considered a panacea. Sterilised dogs can still bite, eat, defecate, urinate, turn over garbage cans, bark, intrude, spread diseases and cause traffic incidents.

Pet rehoming also stops looking like a great idea. When we advocate adoption or give-away programs, are we not just compounding the problems by forcibly recycling dogs? Is not humane euthanasia superior to recycling which exacerbates the situation?

## **FOUR BIG PROBLEMS**

### **Aggression and predation**

Almost every state in the United States has experienced episodes of deer, antelope, cattle, horse and fowl massacre due to domestic dogs, feral dogs or dog-coyote crosses. These incidents produce higher rates of kill than do human hunters in the same areas.

It has been noted that loose dogs and feral dogs may inhabit the same area. Add the coyotes and we may be fostering the development of a new breed of canid. It is said that the loss of one species may mean the survival of another if genes are used to bring about a more suitable creature capable of better survival. Perhaps a pit-croc-a-bull.

Loose dogs are at best a nuisance, and at worst, maulers or killers of humans as well as their own species and others. Free roaming dogs cause problems with predator control in most areas as they obscure wildlife damages.

It has been suggested that specially bred male fighting dogs be neutered and introduced into troubled areas to compete aggressively with the local dogs and bitches, curtailing the birth rate. My question is, "Then what do we do with the land sharks we have created?"

### **Unwants**

Displayed puppies and kitties are all cute. But, picture this scenario:

Junior wails for a puppy. Finally, the parents give in when Junior promises to care for the pup. Parents insist on a male puppy.

They take him home, where he promptly urinates, or worse, on Mom's new living room carpet, and is banished from the living room. He then chews on the antique furniture, on clothes left on the floor, and eats a brand new pair of expensive jogging shoes left outside the closet. Sure he's just teething.

Pup is banished to the yard where he chews on Dad's garden tools, digs up the flower beds, tears clothes from the line, digs holes in Dad's prize lawn and finally defecates right on the path where all family members step in it and bring it back into the house and on the carpet.

This usually takes about two weeks. Shortly, since Junior is no longer looking after the pup (he doesn't know how), Dad is tired of having his daily newspaper demolished. Mom screams, "Get rid of that ---- dog".

Puppy is then taken to the local humane society or the local animal control facility "for certain adoption", or is taken out in the country and dumped. One more disposable item.

The majority of the animals picked up in San Antonio are "not wanteds". This service is free on the supposition that owners would otherwise just turn them loose on the street. The average cost to the City to dispatch (radio), pick up and return to the Facility is approximately \$US26.00. Thus you can see this is an expensive losing battle.

Live trapping, is inefficient, except perhaps in isolated areas. Tranquilliser pistols and rifles may be useful as a last resort. Other methods such as steel traps, shooting and poisoning are not considered humane under most conditions. No matter how distasteful these may be, owners who refuse to restrain their dogs cannot reasonably condemn these severe yet effective methods.

Humane shelters are caught on the horns of a dilemma, being called on to house and care for the disposable dogs, while being frustrated at being forced to euthanase more and more animals.

A recent survey conducted by the US National Animal Control Association in 1981 revealed 918 people surrendering their dogs for adoption at 13 shelters in eight states. This survey stereotyped the situations in which a dog is thought to be disposable. The dog was obtained free of charge, usually from a neighbour, friend or newspaper ad as a puppy. It was kept usually about 18 months before being turned in because of changes in the family's lifestyle, real or imagined, behavioural problems, or requiring too much time and responsibility.

The greater the cost of the dog, the longer it was kept. More than two-thirds of the unwanted dogs were obtained cost free. It was concluded that the degree of attachment and the depth of the human-animal companion bond is directly related to the financial investment in the animal.

## **Pollution**

Social costs to be considered include decorative flower beds trampled or adversely fertilised, or dug up, garbage strewn and fences jumped. Add these to your lists.

A significant threat to the ecosystem is the quantity of faeces and urine produced by the average dog in an average day. For New York City, this amounts to approximately 9 million kilograms of waste daily.

Deposits of 500 000 kilograms of faeces are equivalent to having an additional four million people in the environment. The fact that this pollution is tolerated in our conservation conscious society is nothing less than obscene. Will this pollution continue? Will it ultimately bury us?

## **Livestock losses**

It is estimated that \$US500 000 000 is paid for animal control by cities and counties in the United States annually. Nearly fifteen million pets are euthanased annually at a cost of \$US150 000 000. Bites number between two and three million of which only one million are actually reported.

Livestock damage in the United States costs in excess of \$US10 000 000 annually in compensations. In 1973, 515 Ontario municipalities paid farmers \$CAN160 000 for cattle, poultry, sheep and swine. What starts as a game of chase quickly escalates into maim, catch and kill. An acquaintance in Barbados had his means of livelihood snuffed out by a pack of marauding dogs. All of his ducks were killed including his breeders as well as his young birds.

It is worthy of report that approximately one million dogs and cats are killed by automobiles in the United States annually.

Consider also:

- resource competition: Will we permit the destruction of marine life as well in order to feed these dogs and cats? The wild horse population was thus decimated in order to produce pet food.
- noise pollution: Sirens we may ignore, but barking dogs and yowling cats are disturbing to those of average sensitivities, including neighbours. Is this not disturbing to even the most ardent of pet owners?

Man who domesticated dog, now often throws him away or keeps him in a careless and totally irresponsible way. Are we to be so unaware as to permit our "best friend" to become the master of our environment?

## **WHY IS IT SO?**

Let's face it folks; everyone does NOT need a pet. It has been suggested that because of this those groups advocating adoptions actually contribute to our problems.

There is a big difference between wanting something and needing it. There is also a big difference between wanting something and being prepared to responsibly own it.

Pets are simply not the kind of thing you can put in the cupboard when you are sick of them. You can't give them away like hand-me-down clothing when you outgrow them.

Unfortunately, pets are often obtained in an emotional, undisciplined manner.

Since the cave people, from their tables fed the first dogs, we have domesticated, fed, loved, indulged and genetically altered these, our most preferred companion animals. Now that we have them dependent upon us, we trash them.

Thus evolves the no deposit, no return pet, just like the paper plates and napkins that we create, mass produce, distribute, use and then thrown away. This is what we do to our "best friend".

## **WHY WE NEED ANIMAL CONTROL**

It is self evident from the preceding parts of this paper that the popular image of pet ownership involving best friends and their loving and totally dedicated owners is mostly fantasy.

While there is no doubt that people can benefit from pet ownership, there is no doubt also that without effective urban animal management there can be a whole lot of grief as well.

Pet ownership is very much a matter of positives and negatives. There are techniques of urban animal management which can logically prevent or at least minimise most of the bad things that stem from irresponsible pet ownership. By eliminating the negatives, animal control can serve to accentuate the positives.

## **Possible solutions**

- placing responsibility on the owner: Instead of impounding the animal, issue citations which require court appearances and the imposition of fines and associated inconveniences. Institute hot pursuit legislation, ie pursue dog from street to his own yard and cite owner.
- limiting pet ownership: Permit a certain number of animals to be kept. Seizure and fines for offenders.
- registration and identification: Register each animal annually for a fee (less expensive for sterilised if you wish). Questionnaire included with utility bill for census, meter readers (utility) report who has dogs and how many. Registration tag or chip on or in dog.

- control of breeding: Require permit to own or keep dogs for breeding. Require a fee for litters whelped.
- obedience training: Perhaps the local kennel clubs would assist by giving demonstrations:- sit, come, down, stay and "NO".
- networking between cities: Sharing data.
- meetings: like this, where brainstorming can occur. Support conference planning committees. It is a monumental task to plan a theme, decide on speakers, content, time allotted, hours of meetings, breaks, participation during breaks and meals, and still keep everyone on the edge of the chair in eager anticipation. Certainly not for the faint of heart or the lackadaisical.
- public interaction: Groups meet in homes, get suggestions from a counsellor or psychologist to help you to relieve stress. Use of companion animals to educate about the problem eg in schools, scout troops, parent teacher organisations, church groups, pet days. Visit nursing homes with dogs meeting health and temperament requirements. These may be accomplished by ACO (animal control officer) visitation, even in schools when holding career days or presentations on responsible pet ownership, diseases or whatever.
- promoting ACO professionalism: Uniforms, certification, identifying patches or pins and badges to show the professionalism of contemporary urban animal management.

## CONCLUSION

Animal control officers are an elite group. What other special group could apprehend, handle and care for these poor societal rejects? What other group is more capable and prepared to help actually resolve urban pet problems?

Animal control is an art and a proud profession, equal in importance to fire, ambulance and police services. Animal control officers, like these other officers, protect the health and welfare of people. More than this, however, they protect the animals as well.

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The National Animal Control Association in America presented their first academy earlier this year. The program included 100 hours of instruction of which ten were presented by Annelda. In the area of animal control Annelda has been involved with such august institutions as The United Nations, The Humane Society of the United States and The Delta Society. Over the past thirty odd years Annelda has worked as senior health department official, animal control consultant, animal control officer educator and small animal veterinary practitioner. Annelda has come to Australia to participate in this conference and to see how we do it down under.

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