



Sociedade
Mundial de
Proteção Animal

SHELTER POLICIES



Objective:

This guideline aims to present key issues concerning the lives of animals in shelters, particularly dogs and cats. The science of Animal Welfare is the basic foundation of this paper, considering it gathers information which allows us to provide better quality of life for animals.

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SHELTER POLICIES

1. INTRODUCTION

This guideline aims to present key issues concerning the lives of animals in shelters, particularly dogs and cats. The science of Animal Welfare is the basic foundation of this paper, considering it gathers information which allows us to provide better quality of life for animals.

A shelter for dogs and cats is a place that gathers and cares for a considerable number of animals, most of which collected on the streets or taken by their owners, who do not want to, or can no longer take care of them.

An animal shelter has three main goals: 1. be a safe haven for animals that need it; 2. serve as a place of transition, trying to relocate these animals to permanent homes; 3. be core reference in programs of care, control, and animal welfare.

As one of its main goals, a shelter must plan permanent adoption programs, relocating the animals to new homes as soon as possible, where they may have a chance to live with a family and, thus, be reinserted into society. The abandonment and abuse suffered in the past create, in these animals, diverse psychological disturbances, especially anxiety, insecurity, and emotional vulnerability. Relocation to a new, safe and welcoming family unit is a key factor in the recovery of the physical and mental health of these animals, contributing to their emotional stability.

For rehoming, however, animals need the shelter for their prompt physical and behavioural recovery, and to find suitable families and homes. In addition, a shelter must also act as a multiplier of the concepts of animal welfare, responsible ownership, and more efficient actions to control the population of dogs and cats, aware of the public policy established in the city and the possibility of partnerships for the development of better treatment for animals in (our) society. For such, periodic training is necessary for all professionals working at the shelter, with a view to their own physical and mental well-being, and a harmonious interaction with the animals.

SHELTER = PLACE OF TRANSITION

Although many organizations view the installation of an animal shelter as a pressing need in their communities, this is not always the best solution. Shelters are expensive, both to build and to run, and require a great deal of planning and organization. Neither do shelters effectively solve the problem of stray animals in the medium to long term.

KEY CONCEPTS:

Animal Welfare – “The physiological and psychological condition in which the pet is able to adapt easily to the environment, meet its basic needs and develop skills according to its biological nature.” Calderon, N.2009

Animal needs: human and non-human animals have basic needs which can be grouped in five categories:

1 – physiological and sensory: provide fresh water and a balanced diet that will keep animals healthy and vigorous; ensure the prevention, rapid diagnosis and treatment of diseases, injuries, and pain; promote exercises and games, besides sensory stimuli of the chemical type (odours, pheromones), visual (people and other animals), auditory (barking control and noises), and tactile (interactions with animals and people, caresses, massages and regular grooming);

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2 – physical and environmental: provide adequate and sufficient space to define the different areas of activity, for instance: to rest and sleep comfortably, to shelter and hide or isolate, for disposal of faeces/urine, etc.; ensure adequate conditions of sun/shade, temperature, humidity, ventilation, light, distribution and access to feeders and drinkers, good hygiene and disinfection, when needed;

3 – behavioural: provide adequate space and the company of the animals’ own kind to express their life and natural behaviour, for instance: define and delimit territory space (areas of activity), build a nest, care for puppies, dig the earth, run, jump, play, compete, socialize, etc.; ensure a good level of activity and opportunity of choice (preferences) and alternation of their behaviour;

4 – social: promote activities and the company of animals and people, ensure their preference for living in solitude, in pairs or in groups; ensure good socialization to puppies (3 to 12 weeks old), and to kittens (2 to 8 weeks old); offer opportunities for interaction, mediating conflicts and fights, identifying the social organization (hierarchy) within the kennels; ensure areas of isolation and remoteness for cats, acknowledging the use of their space;

5 – psychological and cognitive: promote environmental stimulation (sensorial), psychological and social, including, for instance, recreational and exploratory activities, so as to prevent boredom and frustration, besides other negative feelings as fear (anxiety), sadness (depression), distress, stress, etc.; ensure conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering.

Animals in captivity, as those living in a shelter or zoo, for instance, are entirely dependent upon humans to provide conditions that will satisfy their basic needs. It is very important that all their needs be met.

The “Five Freedoms” – animal welfare can be measured by this instrument, which was developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, in the UK - <http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm>

This concept is a useful tool for initial evaluation of the conditions of any animal, including those in shelters, which can be assessed as follows:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst – through the supply of fresh water and a balanced diet to maintain animals healthy and vigorous;
- Freedom from pain, injury, and disease – through prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment;
- Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering;
- Freedom from discomfort – by providing an adequate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area;
- Free to express normal behaviour – by providing sufficient space and promoting activities and the company of the animals’ own kind.

One of the most important contributions of Animal Welfare Science is that the studies developed a new attitude in man towards animals and, consequently, a change in respect to the way they are seen, treated, and assisted in their needs. The Animal Welfare Science has expanded and refined man’s outlook on animals, leading them to acknowledge that animals need more than water and food, hygiene and veterinary care. Animals, especially mammals, are intelligent and capable of rich emotional experiences, communicate in a complex form, are curious and creative, aware of the world around them. Most of the species are therefore, affected by confinement, isolation and a sterile environment. Thus, the modern concept of shelter is the one which provides, in its construction and operation, beyond the need for food, hygiene, and health, an environment which meets the psychological, social, and behavioural needs of animals, giving them rich stimuli, affection, and interaction. We are talking about a new model of shelter that can only be developed on the grounds that animals have a rich and complex mental life.

The basic needs of dogs and cats must be met and the “Five Freedoms” is an objective tool to assess the conditions in which they are living.

2. ESTABLISHING SHELTER POLICIES

Establishing policies helps to run an organization, with minimum standards of action which will make for more efficient day-to-day routine tasks. They also reflect the basic principles your organization considers paramount.

Very important decisions regard the admission of new animals and the number of animals to be sheltered, neutering, rehoming and euthanasia. These issues will affect the way the shelter operates, the length of time animals spend in the shelter, and their quality of life.

It is also essential to establish policies for good relations with the community in general, and with the veterinarians in the region, both those who work in private practice, as those who work in government agencies, seeking collaboration and partnerships. By developing projects together with the community, such as building a network of temporary foster homes and a marketing program for animal adoption, the shelter's main goals may be reached more effectively.

When establishing policies for your shelter, some issues should be considered:

- the goals of your organization;
- the benefits that can be reached and provided for the animals;
- costs and financing;
- public opinion about the organization;
- the effectiveness of performance;
- the work team needed;
- the operations manual and those responsible for it;
- protocols and strategies for decision making;

It is important to consider the consequences which the established policies will bring to your organization, financially and in terms of public opinion. Your organization will have to bear the costs of policy implementation, although it is regarded as beneficial and relevant.

ADMISSION OF NEW ANIMALS

The admission of new animals should be a matter of objective analysis and planning. Before accepting, you must check for vacancies, considering the shelter's capacity, depending on space and budget. If there are no vacancies, you can consider referring the animals to temporary homes, whenever possible.

The arrival and departure of all animals must be efficiently controlled, through a daily record, under the supervision of the manager, and must be reviewed, at least, weekly. Annotations may be made by hand, at first, by the staff, as a matter of saving time, and then be converted into digital form.

Each animal should have a record, which will include the history and all relevant information pertaining to it, from the arrival date until departure (by adoption or death).

Each enclosure (kennel or cattery) should have a sheet at hand, with the name of its occupants and whatever other basic necessary information (as medication prescriptions, diet, behavioral problems).

Every incoming animal must be examined by a veterinarian and classified into the following categories:

- healthy animal;
- animal with injuries or light to moderate health problem;
- animal with injuries or severe health problem;
- animal with infectious disease.

After the admission assessment and classification of their health status, all animals should be put in individual kennels/catteries in quarantine – dogs for at least ten days and cats for at least 14 days, and all measures should be immediately taken with assistance and veterinary treatment, in the case of unhealthy animals. Any animal which, during this time, presents

symptoms of infectious diseases should be kept in quarantine for at least 21 days (incubation period of most infectious diseases). This timeframe can be adjusted according to incubation periods of common infectious diseases seen in your shelter or area.

It is very important that you have a dedicated quarantine area at the shelter, away from the common areas for kennels and catteries. It is essential that there be no contact between animals in quarantine or between animals in quarantine and those ready for adoption.

After quarantine, and before going to the kennels/catteries, animals must be examined by the veterinarian again, vaccinated, cleaned and free of external parasites, wormed and sterilized.

The quarantine period offers the opportunity to assess the animal for clinical or behavioural problems. This information will help in regrouping/mixing animals together in the common areas and also rehoming. This data should always be recorded.

NUMBER OF SHELTERED ANIMALS

Every space has a capacity limit. When it is exceeded, all kinds of problems may arise, harming or jeopardizing scheduled activities. In the case of a shelter, or any place which collects and treats animals, exceeding the limits in respect to quantity would result in increased injuries, diseases and deaths, due to the rising level of stress and contamination, reduced space and comfort, reduced quality and even amount of food and assistance, increase in fights and different behavioural changes. It is very important, therefore, that the number of animals admitted and kept at the shelter be planned and limits established, considering, mainly, available space, budget, and staff.

A simple way to establish the number of animals a shelter can hold, at the most, taking the available space into account, is to divide the total area for animal housing by the minimum area required for one animal. See examples below.

Kennel: outdoors/indoors	
Total area for animal housing	500 m ²
Minimum required area for one animal	5 m ²
Maximum number of animals	100

www.kenneldesign.com

Cattery: outdoors	
Minimum required area for 1-2 /Group >4	2m ² / 10m ²
Area in m ³ per cat (760 mm x 1220 mm x 915 mm)	0.84 m ³
Total area and maximum number of animals	30m x 15

Calculating the maximum number of animals the shelter can hold is not made, however, solely on the basis of available space. The budget and the number of people working at the organization should also be considered. If the budget is not enough to ensure good quality food, veterinary care, environmental enrichment, hygiene and maintenance, enough personnel to provide the necessary care to animals, among other essential items, even if there is space for a certain number of animals, this number should be strategically reduced to suit budget and personnel available.

STERILIZATION PROGRAMME

The purpose of neutering dogs and cats is to control their population and it is an essential element in the dissemination of the concept of responsible pet ownership.

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The best recommendation is to spay/neuter all animals at the shelter, particularly those which will be rehomed. Including the rehoming only of spayed/neutered animals as a policy is a way of educating and preventing, in a certain way, the animal from being abandoned again or perpetuating the problem by generating new litters. Thus, it is essential to consider costs. Using less invasive techniques and more experienced professionals may be one way of ensuring better quality and less costly procedures. The most modern surgical techniques allow for the sterilization of dogs and cats from eight weeks of age.

Although neutering males is less costly, ideally every animal at the shelter should be sterilized. Thus, there may be decreased stress, fights, and noise produced by animals at the shelter in general. Neutering may prevent diseases, including prostate and testicular cancer, and reduce fights, escapes, and inappropriate elimination of urine and faeces. Spaying reduces the risk of pyometra (a serious infection of the uterus) and mammary cancer, and increases the chances for adoption.

REHOMING

Relocation of animals in new homes, through planning of permanent adoption programs, should be one of the main priorities at the shelter. Rehoming should be made as soon as possible, surely after being careful to ensure that the animal’s basic needs will be met, at the new home, including affection and attention. In well chosen new homes, animals can have a new chance to interact intimately with a family, a condition which turns out to be one of their basic needs, since they are a social species which have been living closely to human groups for centuries. A long period of time at the shelter, due to factors inherent to the condition of institutionalization, may generate stress and produce changes in behaviour, from mild ones to those classified as severe and difficult to correct.

Having people who work with education/training may reduce the risks of adopted animals being returned or abandoned again, and assist the integration of the animal to the family. Adoption of animals which have learned basic commands such as “sit”, “stay”, and “walk alongside” can also be facilitated.

Your rehoming policy will directly affect, therefore, the length of time animals spend in your shelter. Besides, the policy has a great influence on the overall capacity of the shelter. The rigor in establishing criteria for potential adopters can reduce the number of acceptable homes; however these precautions can reduce the risks of these animals being mistreated in their new homes, returned to the shelter or abandoned again. The understanding that an open vacancy at the shelter, due to animal rehoming, can favor another animal that is in great suffering on the street, may assist in the setting up of standard operating procedures (SOP) for adoption.

When planning your policy for rehoming, the following should be considered:

1. Donate animals only to adopters who meet the minimum criteria established by your organization, verified through a questionnaire or interview; the questionnaire or interview will give you the opportunity to grasp the potential adopter’s understanding of the principles of responsible ownership;
2. Depending on the number of workers and volunteers at the institution, a previous visit to the home of the adopter may be included in the SOP for adoption, allowing assessment of basic issues related to the space for the animal and the physical barriers to prevent escapes.
3. The visit is also important after a predetermined period of time of adoption. In this manner, the relationship of the animal with the family and how it is really being kept can be better verified. If possible, behavioral guidance should be available to the adopter, even if by phone, since behavioral problems are one of the most common causes of abandonment of animals.

All animal adoptions must be registered and made with the use of the Commitment Term for Adoption, signed by the adopter and the employee at the shelter, which will seal the conditions and responsibilities of the adopter and the shelter’s right to retrieve the animal whenever conditions and responsibilities are not being met.

All animals referred to adoption must be neutered/spayed, including puppies from 8 (eight) weeks of age. The animal should also leave with a worming and vaccination certificate and, if possible, a complete medical history.

Whenever possible, a helpful suggestion is to research the causes for unwanted animals in nearby regions and in regions within access or under the shelter's influence. With this information, and with the use of appropriate strategies, the organization may influence the gradual reduction of this practice.

EUTHANASIA

Deciding under what circumstances an animal will be euthanised is undoubtedly one of the most difficult decisions that your organization will have to make. When planning your euthanasia policy, pertinent legislation must be considered, as well as the pros and cons of the decision. In any situation, the animal's health and welfare must be the parameter. Every case should be examined individually and, if possible, the decision should be shared, for instance, between two veterinarians and an employee, or between one veterinarian and a board member. Euthanasia can only be performed by a veterinarian, always following the current legislation on the subject, especially the rules of the Federal Council of Veterinary Medicine

The acceptable methods for euthanasia are those which promote a humanitarian death, without pain, without stress or any type of physical or mental suffering. The most recommended substances for this procedure are barbiturates, with or without pre-anesthetics and other substances after general anesthesia

Protocol recommended by the Federal Council of Veterinary Medicine:
ftp://ftp.cve.saude.sp.gov.br/doc_tec/outros/bepa_suple7v6_caesgatos.pdf

3. DESIGNING THE SHELTER

Kennels and catteries should be designed so as to provide comfort, safety, and protection from the weather. When planning the design of a shelter, one should consider:

- the needs of the animals, for example, space, comfort, safety, isolation;
- the needs of the staff;
- the needs of the people visiting the shelter.

When designing a shelter, preventing the spread of diseases must be your first priority. Incoming animals should be housed individually, in quarantine area, away from healthy animals that are ready for adoption. The quarantine area must not be accessible to the general public.

Specific areas for treatment and medication of animals and food preparation are also needed. An ample space for recreation and exercise must also be included in the design. Dead animals must be kept in a specific place, containing a freezer, until their final destination, in accordance with the current sanitary norms.

SPACE

The space occupied by the animals must be built in such a way as to ensure their welfare and prevent diseases, stress/distress, escapes, and fights.

Recommendations as to the type of kennel (individual or group) will depend on several factors. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Since animals cannot "choose" their pack or group and are territorialists, behaving according to a social hierarchy, particularly dogs, stress and problems generated by the grouping of a great number of animals may be reduced by keeping them in small groups of two, three, or even four animals.

1. Recommended for dogs:

1.1 - Individual kennels: Individual kennels should be used, preferably, by pregnant females or those with puppies, animals with aggressive behaviour which do not adapt to the company of other animals, injured animals or those undergoing treatment, and animals with infectious diseases. Each animal must have a minimum of 2 square meters of covered area for rest and shelter from bad weather. This area must contain a comfortable bed/raised surface and room

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for bowls with food and water, built in a way that prevents the entry of sun, rain, and wind. In this environment, the minimum temperature must be 10°C, and the maximum 26°C. The covered area must be well ventilated and lit. Besides the covered area, each animal also requires a minimum of 2.5 to 3.5 square meters of open area for sun baths and short exercises. The covered area must have a permanent passage to the open area. Animals must have a good view to the outside of the kennel.

1.2 - Group housing: Group kennels are not suitable for sick, injured or nursing animals; in these cases, individual kennels are preferable, until a change of condition occurs. Aggressive dogs must be kept with a small number of other dogs, provided they are well adapted, or be put in individual kennels, being careful in providing them with space and time for exercise, recreation, and socialization. Group kennels should also have a covered area, for rest and protection from bad weather, and an open area, for sun baths and short exercises. The number of beds/raised surfaces and of bowls for food and water must match the number of animals housed. The required minimum space for dogs living in groups is the same as for a dog in an individual kennel. Animals should only be housed in group kennels after quarantine, with a minimum of ten days of isolation. Care must be taken so that incompatible animals in regard to age, size, and behaviour are not grouped together. The practice of sterilizing all animals or the strict separation by sex must be used in group kennels.

Keeping dogs in isolation, or tied to chains or to their doghouses, or in any confined space, is totally unacceptable and can configure abuse, considering their physical, psychological, behavioural, social, and environmental needs.

The daily release of dogs, be it through individual walks or grouped together in an open area, so they can play, run, exercise, and interact, is essential for stress reduction, which usually occurs in captivity, and to meet their basic needs. Every dog must have the opportunity to play and exercise daily, at least for two periods of 30 minutes or one period of one hour.

2. Recommended for cats:

There are advantages and disadvantages in the use of both individual catteries as group housing. For many cats, being alone in a single unit, with a view of other animals at their wish, with an area to hide when feeling threatened, may be more recommended than group catteries.

2.1 – Individual catteries: The facilities for cats must be visually and acoustically separated from those for dogs. Preferably, individual catteries should house pregnant females or those with litter, injured animals or those undergoing treatment, and animals with infectious diseases. The enclosed area, plus the open area for sun baths and exercise, must have a minimum of 2.2 cubic meters, with the opening facing the front. The enclosed area must contain a bed, shelves for climbing, and space for bowls with food and water, built in such a way as to prevent the entry of sun, rain, and wind. Cardboard boxes or those made of washable material, for accommodation or hiding, may be laid on the shelves. Boxes or plastic trays, containing sawdust, sand, or shredded newspaper can be used for disposal of cat waste and should be placed far from the feeders and drinkers. The enclosed area must have a permanent passage to the open area. Good ventilation is essential and, when the catteries face each other, they must be at least two meters apart to prevent the spread of diseases.

2.2 – Group housing: Good ventilation is essential in group housing. Cats need access to enclosed areas, with containers for food and water and a bed, and access to the open area. The materials and objects listed above should also be available in group housing, such as shelves, boxes for accommodation, dirt/litter trays. Enclosed space or boxes should be available for animals which prefer isolation. The minimum temperature is 10°C, and the maximum cannot exceed 26°C. The maximum size of a group is 50 animals, but smaller groups are recommended. When housed in groups, they must all be sterilized or strictly separated by sex.

Keeping cats in total isolation, tied to chains or inside cages, or in any confined space is totally unacceptable, considering their physical, psychological, behavioural, social, and environmental needs.

COMFORT

The design and operation of a shelter should be planned so as to provide a safe and comfortable stay for the animals. It is important to be aware of the maintenance of the building structures to avoid injuries and other problems resulting from wear. To meet the basic needs of animals at the shelter, adequate space for the expression of natural behaviours should be offered, such as lying and rising comfortably, walking freely, running and playing. The facilities should promote a rich environment, providing physical and mental stimuli, complex and interactive, thus offering a better quality of life for animals.

It is important to identify factors which generate stress, such as extreme temperatures, noise or unpleasant or intense odours, lack of physical activity or social life, intense competition, and prolonged confinement.

Noise pollution at kennels should be well managed. Materials can be chosen for the construction or division of kennels which are more appropriate to reduce noise. The ceiling height and the type of material used in the lining/roof will also greatly affect noise. To reduce stress of animals and staff, it is important to evaluate the situation and have a professional indicate the best ways to diminish these problems.

4. ESTABLISHING SHELTER ROUTINES

Routine actions that are well standardized and recorded in writing will ensure that daily operations be carried out more efficiently.

The daily basic routine should include the following, among other procedures:

- check all facilities;
- observe animals at least twice a day to check health conditions, behaviour, and welfare;
- report to the veterinarian or to the person responsible for the shelter any sign of injury, disease, or change in animal behaviour;
- Adjust ventilation and heating;
- Clean and disinfect kennels, catteries, and other facilities;
- Clean and disinfect feeding utensils;
- Prepare and distribute food and water to animals;
- Provide veterinary care and hygiene for every animal;
- Provide exercise and recreation for all animals, favouring their socialization;
- Check the safety of the facilities.

Ensure a clean, comfortable, safe, and healthy environment for every animal.

Use the "Five Freedoms" tool to assess the animals, the facilities, and the environment they live in.

FOOD

Good quality food, provided at least twice a day, is the basis of a dog's diet. Puppies require food more frequently. In the case of cats, food can be left at will throughout the day. All animals must have a permanent supply of clean and fresh water. There should be planned, daily routines for the administration of food and water, considering the quantity and quality of the nutrients required by animals, according to species, age, size, condition, and the number of housed animals. Regular times should be established for feeding and changing food and water. Food should be placed in adequate containers, easy to clean and handle, protected from rain and from contact with waste, rodents, or insects. For dogs, food should be offered in individual containers and, for cats, containers can be placed in sufficient number to feed the animals in small groups.

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The animals' response to food is a manner of assessing its quality. Easy and voluntary consumption indicates its palatability. The assessment of faeces is also important. Animals usually defecate twice a day, and stools should be firm, dry, and easy to collect. Loose, bulky stools can indicate two conditions: food of low digestibility and/or physiological response to the excessive consumption of food. Where a dog's stools are "unusual" in shape, size or consistency it is also very possible that this is an indication of a health issue (gastro-intestinal infection). If the stools remain "unusual" for more than 48 hours, veterinary advice should be sought – or sooner if there are other symptoms such as lethargy, sudden weight loss, vomiting etc. Dogs and cats should maintain adequate weight as a result of the consumption of good quality food, and also present good quality skin and hair, without scaling, loss, or discoloration.

The storage of food should be done in a proper place for this purpose, being held in specific containers for such, and placed over a platform to avoid direct contact with the floor. These measures aim at better conservation and utilization of food.

HYGIENE AND CLEANING

A systematic cleaning routine is essential to prevent the spread of diseases and ensure welfare. Consider the following recommendations:

- all occupied kennels/catteries must be cleaned daily;
- animals must be moved out while the kennel/cattery is being cleaned;
- all objects, such as food/water bowls and beds, must be removed and cleaned;
- floor and walls must be thoroughly cleaned.

Observe the following cleaning procedures:

- Prior removal of waste (faeces, emesis and food, among others), that should be packed, packaged, and placed for garbage collection, according to specific legislation;
- Cleaning with clean water and neutral soap or detergent;
- Disinfection with products with sodium hypochlorite 2.5% or derivatives of quaternary ammonium;
- Disposal of wastewater into the sewage system, in compliance with current legislation;
- Drying of the area in case of prolonged dampness.

It is appropriate to consider different cleaning regimes and disinfectants for quarantine kennels as higher standards are required. Which regime/disinfectant is chosen will be dependent on the contaminants likely to be encountered.

Different cleaning regimes should also be considered for standard kennels. If a kennel has been vacated by one dog and is to be occupied by a new dog then there should be a very thorough cleaning procedure. If the same dog is to return to the kennel after cleaning, then a thorough cleaning procedure is not as necessary. As long as faeces/urine/other waste is removed you do not need to worry about cross contamination as it is the same dog returning to the kennel. Additionally, removing all the dog's scent from the kennel and replacing it with a clinical detergent smell may cause the dog unnecessary stress.

Great care must be taken when choosing products which will be used for cleaning and disinfecting the premises and objects used by animals, so as to avoid those with strong odours or which might cause health problems to animals.

The hygiene level at the premises can be evaluated on a scale that goes from GOOD to VERY POOR. Consider the indications below hygiene:

- GOOD: the surfaces of kennels /catteries are dry, free from faeces and urine, and free from garbage or any waste material; animals can move easily without coming into contact with excrements, garbage or other waste; normal behaviour is not impaired; animals can rest without coming into contact with excrements or waste; normal locomotion behaviour can be seen and animals can adopt proper body postures; the surfaces of kennels/catteries seem to be cleaned on a regular basis and there are no unpleasant odours;

- ADEQUATE: the surfaces of kennels/catteries is not so clean as those aforementioned; they may be dry in some places, and there may be some accumulation of animal faeces and urine; garbage or other waste may be present; animals cannot move easily without coming into

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contact with some excrement or other waste; normal behaviour may be impaired occasionally; animals cannot rest without coming into contact with excrement or other waste; normal locomotion behaviour can be seen and animals can adopt proper body postures; the surfaces of kennels/catteries seem to be cleaned less frequently than those aforementioned; kennels/catteries exhale unpleasant odours;

- POOR: the surface of kennels/catteries is dirty and covered in faeces and urine or garbage and other waste accumulated for some days; animals cannot move without coming into contact with excrements or other waste; normal behaviour is impaired; animals cannot rest without coming into contact with excrements or other waste; normal locomotion behaviour is impaired and animals cannot adopt proper body postures; the surfaces of kennels/catteries aren't cleaned for days or weeks and exhale unpleasant odours;

- VERY POOR: the surface of kennels/catteries is very dirty and covered in faeces and urine accumulated for many weeks; there is also an accumulated garbage and other waste; animals cannot move without coming into contact with excrements or other waste; normal behaviour is impaired; animals cannot rest without coming into contact with excrements or other waste; normal locomotion behaviour is impaired and animals cannot adopt proper body postures; the surfaces of kennels/catteries are not cleaned for months and exhale strong unpleasant odours;

CONDITION AND MAINTENANCE OF FACILITIES

The condition and level of maintenance of facilities is fundamental to ensure the animals' comfort and welfare, and can be evaluated on a scale that goes from GOOD to VERY POOR.

- GOOD: The type of building and the material used, and the conditions of the kennels/catteries, do not provoke any kind of injury or harm to animals; the kennel/cattery may be cleaned effectively; the structure and condition of the kennel/cattery does not restrict animals from their regular resting behaviour and locomotion, neither prevent them from adopting proper body postures; there is little evidence of wear and damage to surfaces and structures;

- ADEQUATE: The type of building and the material used, and the conditions of the kennel/cattery do not provoke, in general, substantial injuries or harm to animals; the kennel/cattery may be cleaned effectively, however, cleaning may be jeopardized by the lack of maintenance of surfaces and structures; the structure and condition of the kennel/cattery does not restrict animals from their regular resting behaviour and locomotion, neither prevent them from adopting proper body postures; there is some evidence of wear and damage to surfaces and structures;

- POOR: The type of building and the material used, and the conditions of the kennel/cattery may provoke injury or harm to animals; effective cleaning of the kennel/cattery is impaired due to poor maintenance, which means that surfaces and structures are damaged; the surface or structure of the kennel/cattery may cause discomfort to animals, restricting their regular resting behaviour and locomotion, and preventing them from adopting proper body postures; there is significant evidence of wear and damage to structures and surfaces; kennel/cattery maintenance has not been done for some years;

- VERY POOR: The type of building and the material used, and the conditions of the kennel/cattery may provoke substantial injuries or harm to animals; effective cleaning of the kennel/cattery is impaired due to very poor maintenance, which means that surfaces and structures are highly damaged; the surface or structure of the kennel/cattery may cause great discomfort to animals, severely restricting their regular resting behaviour and locomotion, and preventing them from adopting proper body postures; kennel/cattery maintenance has not been done for many years;

PARASITE AND DISEASE CONTROL

It is essential to use products against fleas and ticks on all animals at the moment they arrive at the shelter, thus avoiding the spread of these ectoparasites. The control of insects and parasites in the environment is also very important, taking as much care as possible to eliminate them from the facilities. For this purpose, the food storage container must be closed and the water tank covered.

Measures for disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment are essential to keep animals healthy. Shelters must have a veterinarian on the team, who will make the first assessment of the animals and monitor them throughout their stay, and participate in planning and implementing the various programs of the shelter. Annual vaccination of all animals, against rabies and other viruses inherent to each species, is indispensable. Performing periodical treatments against internal and external parasites is also crucial. The observation of inactivity or restlessness, irritability, stiff posture, abnormal vocalization, loss of appetite, licking and self-inflicted biting, can be signs of pain or disease. The rise in mortality rates or the number of sick animals requires prompt investigation of causes and immediate measures must be taken.

All possible precautions must be taken to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases among animals. Any sign of an infectious disease must be immediately treated, the animal isolated, and sanitary measures taken to prevent further spread.

THE MENTAL HEALTH OF ANIMALS

Stress or mental suffering may be identified through some behaviours observed in animals, such as hyper-vigilance, prolonged inactivity, isolation, irritability, stereotypes, compulsions, tics, excessive aggression, excessive fear or phobias. Promoting the mental health of animals is as important as ensuring their physical health. For such, it is necessary to provide care for needs which go beyond giving them water, food, a clean environment, and veterinary care. Dogs and cats need a rich and stimulating environment, which sharpen their curiosity and desire to explore, that lead to challenges and new learning opportunities, with enough space for exercise and play, allowing them to interact and form emotional bonds with people and other animals. At the same time, this environment must be safe, free of threats from people or other animals and, if they occur, must enable animals to go away, escape, or hide.

A strategy to reduce physical and mental stress, typical in captivity, which should be adopted by all shelters, is to promote daily walks or stake out a more extensive area where animals can be released together. Recreation and walks are valuable opportunities for socialization, and it is important that, in these moments, positive contacts with people and other animals are made, so they can carry out recreational and stimulating activities for physical and mental exercise.

HANDLING ANIMALS

The shelter must have its own staff of employees to handle animals and assist them in their basic needs, who should be recruited based on their affinity and positive interaction with animals. The proportion number of employees/number of animals should be such that routine tasks can be completed properly every day. The shelter must have staff working and taking care of animals every day of the year. Qualifying them for essential care to animals and for an ethological management based on the understanding of the typical behaviour of dogs and cats, is very important for an efficient performance, based on respect. All staff must be informed about zoonoses in dogs and cats, prepared to avoid any type of contamination, and vaccinated, at least, against tetanus and rabies.

5. INDISPENSABLE CRITERIA FOR MAINTENANCE OF SHELTERS:

A robust administrative system is vital for a well managed kennel. A clear set of procedures, monitoring and reporting guidelines, record keeping, clear lines of communication and decision making responsibility are required.

Considering the key elements in establishing a policy for running a shelter described in this paper, we list below the necessary conditions for the maintenance of a shelter, without which there is no minimum welfare for the animals.

- 1. Limit the number of sheltered animals, calculated in accordance to space and available budget;**
- 2. Record the arrival and departure of all animals, and the history of registered animals in individual records;**
- 3. A responsible veterinarian in charge;**
- 4. Suitable accommodations for the species, built and kept in such a way as to offer space, comfort, and safety;**
- 5. Cleaning and organization of environment and facilities;**
- 6. Prevention measures for diseases and rapid diagnosis and treatment of animals;**
- 7. Quality food in suitable amounts;**
- 8. Adequate storage for food and medicine;**
- 9. Sterilization program, avoiding the birth of litters at the shelter;**
- 10. Permanent adoption programs;**
- 11. Euthanasia, if necessary, performed with the use of barbiturates;**
- 12. Socialization of animals, including environmental enrichment and positive and frequent interaction with people and other animals;**
- 13. Recreation and daily exercise through walks or release, individually or in groups, in special areas ;**
- 14. Training staff for ethological management and basic care of animals;**
- 15. Caring for the staff – provision of facilities for their basic needs;**

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