

Three Approaches to Solving Pet Overpopulation

Catch & Kill (Prior to 1990)

Cruel, Ineffective, expensive: Did not reduce the number of homeless animals. Most cities have evolved past this strategy.

Control All Pets (1990 to Still Current in many cities)

Uses tactics such as: registering, licensing, limiting numbers, restricting breeds, and sometimes euthanasia. This approach is costly to administer and only captures the responsible pet owners who are not the ones contributing to pet overpopulation. Enforcement is a nightmare with some of these tactics and is ineffective with the irresponsible pet owners (about 15%) who simply turn their current pets over to Animal Control and get new pets.

The Texas Department of State Health Services reports on its website that the cost of licensing or registering pets is much higher than the fees brought in by these programs and that, "Increasing emphasis is being placed on shifting the burden of costs associated with animal care and control to those individuals whose actions and behavior create those expenses. For example, more cities around the nation are requiring the purchase of a breed permit by anyone whose animal has a litter of puppies or kittens. The cities are cognizant of the fact that there are already more dogs and cats than there are homes for them, and , therefore, some of these puppies and kittens will end up at the animal shelter, thereby requiring taxpayers to shoulder the expense of handling them. "

Focus on Irresponsible Pet Owners (2005 to Current and Rapidly Spreading)

This approach acknowledges that 85% of pet owners are responsible and do not contribute to the pet overpopulation problem. They are not costing the

City money and are trying to be good pet owners. These pet owners are being supported by low cost or free spay/neuter services, counseling to try to keep the pet in its home, pet health education and adoption services to provide healthy, sterilized pets.

For the irresponsible pet owners, some cities require that all pets be spay/neutered. Some require registration or a license only for unfixed pets and charge Animal Control pick-up fees that are 3-5 times as high for unaltered pets. Some charge a “breeder fee” for every litter whether or not they are turned in to Animal Control.

Two tactics, one for each species, have proven particularly effective in reducing intake to the municipal shelters.

For cats **Trap/Neuter/Return** has been extremely effective around the world. Just relocating the cats or euthanizing them does not work due to the well documented Vacuum Effect which explains that cats will move into an area or reproduce based on the food resources. When we trap 20 cats and take them to the shelter 20 more will move in fairly quickly and take their place. Now we have 40 cats, with 20 of them residing in the shelter. And the other 20 are still able to reproduce. Sterilizing the original 20 and returning them to their territory stabilizes the population and eliminates the fighting, yowling, spraying, unwanted litters, etc.

This approach recognizes that cats have a natural role in the world of controlling the rodent and snake population. Most rescue groups insist that all cats should live inside because it is less risky for them. But Alley Cat Allies, the prominent feral cat advocates, contend that these cats have a home....and their home is outside. Their powerful arguments are found on: www.alleycat.org.

Leash or restraint laws for cats are being dropped by many cities due to the large number of cats brought into shelters unnecessarily. In those cities the officers no longer pick up cats that are free roaming but not a nuisance. Increasingly it is a violation to have an unfixed cat (or dog) roaming and the Animal Control officer will take that animal to the vet and have it fixed at the pet

owner's expense if the owner is identified and at city or rescue group expense if no owner is identified. Then the cat is returned to its territory and released.

Gonzales' ordinances require that cats as well as dogs must be restrained at all times when not on the owner's property. In contrast, Bastrop's ordinance concerning animals "running at large" applies to dogs but not cats and Cuero's ordinance specifies only dogs in heat in addition to those certified as vicious or nuisance by the Animal Control Officer. In Gonzales cats will be picked up if they walk on someone's property who does not want them there or if they are living outside and someone is afraid they will come to harm via street traffic or other dangers of outside living. This is a much higher service level than in other cities our size or in leadership cities in Animal Care and Control such as Austin. In Austin the running at large ordinance applies to all dogs but not to cats.

For dogs the overpopulation issue is largely due to backyard breeders who repeatedly dump the unsold pups from their litters on the shelter. In our community as in many others, individuals breed their dogs and can make a profit by selling only 2 or 3 from a litter of 10 or more. Then the other 7 or 8 enter our shelter system. In an effort to eliminate the financial incentive for backyard breeders, cities are adopting variants of the **Pet Trader Ordinances** and they require health certificates for each pet sold or given away, restrictions on where the animals can be sold or given away, a Breeder's Number must appear in any ad offering dogs (or cats) for sale or to be given away, micro-chipping, spay/neutering etc. The intent is to make it unattractive financially for these breeders to continue shoving unfixed dogs out into the community. The fees, fines, etc. go to offset the sheltering costs caused by these individuals.

To reduce the costs of Animal Care (separate from Animal Control) you have to reduce the number of animals entering the shelters. The national average for shelter intake/1000 population is 30. Austin is leading edge in our area with a current intake/1000 of 22 and a target for next year of 13. Gonzales' intake/1000 pop is over 100! Although our shelter intake/1000 is triple the national average, our sheltering cost is \$7.46 per capita versus the national average of \$8. This is due to the City having outsourced its sheltering

responsibilities to the Friends of Gonzales Animal Shelter or FOGAS. While this is achieved largely through volunteer efforts, there is still room for major sheltering cost reductions if we are able to reduce our animal intake.

The first step is to determine what level of service we want and whether the community is prepared to shift the excessive costs onto the irresponsible pet owners who are causing them.

Please call or email if we can provide further information.

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