

VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH/HARRIS COUNTY PETS OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR EUTHANASIA NOTIFICATION

1.0 Scope & Application

The Veterinary Public Health (VPH) Division of Harris County Public Health (HCPH) works in partnership with the community to create a safe, healthy, and caring environment for residents and animals of unincorporated Harris County. VPH operates the Harris County Pets Resource Center or Harris County Pets (HCP), an open-admission animal shelter and adoption facility, and the Harris County Pets Clinic, which provides basic, low-cost veterinary services for owned pets. VPH also oversees the animal control field operations for unincorporated Harris County (outside the City of Houston) and serves as a local rabies control authority (LRCA) to ensure the health and safety of the community.

This document outlines the procedures for VPH/HCP to provide a consistent notification system to inform its rescue partners of animals in the shelter's custody that are placed on alert for euthanasia. The document also explains the process of how VPH/HCP place animals on euthanasia alert based on condition, behavior, and length of stay at the shelter.

Please note that VPH/HCP has full authority to amend any items outlined in this document at any time and to make exceptions in certain cases based on unique circumstances, shelter capacity, or staff recommendations.






2.0 Summary

Although VPH/HCP regards euthanasia as a last resort for many animals within its custody, it is an essential component of its operation to compassionately end the suffering of a terminally ill or injured animal or address recurring or dangerous conditions of an animal that compromises the health and safety of the shelter and the community at large. VPH/HCP is committed to ensuring that every healthy and adoptable animal at its shelter has the opportunity and reasonable time to have a positive outcome through adoption, fosters, transport, and rescue efforts.

The procedures below outline the process in which VPH/HCP identifies animals as candidates for euthanasia, as well as the steps the agency will take to inform rescue partners of those animals on the euthanasia list with sufficient advance notice to allow them the time to act with the hope of saving an animal's life. VPH/HCP recognizes the important role that its rescue partners and networkers play in saving the lives of at-risk animals and values a consistent, fair, and timely euthanasia notification system that will enable its partners to be more successful in their work.

Definitions of key terms and references for this operating procedure can be found on page 3.

HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.

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3.0 Euthanasia Notification Procedure

- 3.1 To participate in the rescue program at HCP, all rescue groups must be pre-approved by the agency and abide by the requirements outlined in the [Harris County Pets Rescue Policy](#). Instructions to register as a pre-approved rescue partner, along with application and agreement forms, are available at <https://www.countypets.com/Rescue-Partners>.
 - 3.1.1 A rescue partner that fails to comply to any of the standards listed in the Rescue Policy may result in their pulling privileges being suspended or revoked.
- 3.2 HCP medical and/or shelter staff evaluate all kennels occupied by animals on a daily and routine basis and document a brief note of an animal's condition (medically or behaviorally) in the shelter's record system as needed.
- 3.3 Candidates for euthanasia will be assessed, vetted, documented, and approved by the VPH/HCP management team
- 3.4 The criteria for placing an animal on the euthanasia list are based on medical and behavioral conditions, bite cases, dangerous/aggressive behavior, mental deterioration of the animal, court order, and length of stay.
- 3.5 **An animal in the custody of the shelter is given 30 full days before being considered for euthanasia.**
- 3.6 Once a euthanasia list of animals is reviewed, vetted, and approved, the list will be sent via email to rescue partners from Postmaster.
- 3.7 The euthanasia/urgent notice lists (coded in ORANGE) will be sent twice each week by email on Mondays and Wednesdays before 5 p.m. **Rescue groups are given at least 48 hours to act (e.g., tagging an animal from the shelter or promoting the animal for rescue to the public) before an animal is to be euthanized.** VPH/HCP conducts all euthanasia procedures on Wednesdays and Fridays. PLEASE NOTE: *Animals must be picked up no later than the 5 p.m. deadline on the day of the scheduled euthanasia.*
- 3.8 A subsequent final notification (coded in RED) of all remaining animals from each initial urgent notice sent on Monday or Wednesday will be distributed at least 24 hours prior to the 5 p.m. deadline of the schedule euthanasia.
- 3.9 BEFORE the final euthanasia list is distributed, approved rescue groups will also receive every other week via email a separate list of animals that have exceeded the minimum 30-day stay (coded in YELLOW); the email will indicate animals from that list will be selected and placed on the 48-hour euthanasia list based on length of stay, behavior and other conditions.
- 3.10 A rescue group can tag an animal from the list within the 48-hour timeframe of the notification by sending an email to rescueme@countypets.com. VPH/HCP holds the right to extend the time frame at the request of a rescue group if circumstances might delay the retrieval of a tagged animal. The VPH Director has sole authority to consider and approve all extensions.
- 3.11 All tagged animals will be cleared for release from the shelter. All medical paperwork, vaccination records, microchip registration form and other relevant documents will be provided to the rescue group at the time the animal is picked up.

- 3.12 If a rescue partner fails to pick up a tagged animal by the 5 p.m. deadline of the scheduled euthanasia date (Wednesdays and Fridays) without advanced notice to the shelter, the animal will be humanely euthanized.

4.0 Definitions

- 4.1 **EUTHANASIA** -- The intentional causing of a painless death. It is a process that involves the scientific and empathetic considerations of providing each animal with the least stressful death possible. All VPH employees performing euthanasia are in compliance with the Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 821 Sec. 821.055: TRAINING FOR EUTHANASIA TECHNICIANS.
- 4.2 **VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH (VPH)** – A division of Harris County Public Health that oversees all operations and services at the Harris County Pets Resource Center
- 4.3 **HARRIS COUNTY PETS RESOURCE CENTER** – The open-admission animal shelter and adoption facility located at 612 Canino Road in Houston, Texas.
- 4.4 **HARRIS COUNTY PETS CLINIC** – A veterinary care clinic that offers basic, low-cost services and treatment for qualifying pets throughout the community throughout the community. The clinic is located at the Harris County Pets Resource Center at 612 Canino Road in Houston, Texas.
- 4.5 **HARRIS COUNTY PETS (HCP)** – The public-facing organizational entity that provides all Veterinary Public Health services and resources to the community.
- 4.6 **RESCUE GROUPS/PARTNERS** – Those groups involved in the rescue and transport of animals at Harris County Pets. These groups are approved by VPH/HCP to participate in the agency’s rescue program and agree to abide by the [Harris County Pets Rescue Policy](#).
- 4.7 **TAG/TAGGING** – The act of placing an identified animal on hold for rescue purposes. Shelter animals that have a high probability of being adopted are not considered prime candidates for rescue.
- 4.8 **UNINCORPORATED HARRIS COUNTY** – The residential/business areas and municipalities within Harris County that are outside the boundaries of the City of Houston. Certain services that are an expense and rely on tax funding from the public, such as animal control and animal surrenders, are provided only to residents of unincorporated Harris County. Other services that generate revenue for the shelter, such as adoptions and the Harris County Pets Clinic, is open to anyone in Harris County and beyond.

5.0 References

- 5.1 [Harris County Pets Rescue Policy](#)
- 5.2 Harris County Pets Rescue Partners web page: www.CountyPets.com/Rescue-Partners
- 5.3 Harris County Pets Euthanasia Notification Policy

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