

The Declaration of the No Kill Movement in the United States

September 2005

I. Preamble

One hundred and fifty years ago, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals and other humane organizations were founded to establish standards for humane treatment of animals, to promote their rights, and to protect them from harm. This marked the formal beginning of the humane movement in the United States.

The scope and influence of these early humane organizations were testament to the public's concern for animals. It did not take long for them to set their sights on the abuse of homeless animals and cruel methods of killing by public pounds. It was common practice at the time for city and town dogcatchers to beat, drown, or shoot homeless animals.

Many humane agencies responded by entering into animal control contracts with towns and cities to ensure that the killing was done more humanely. But in taking on municipal animal control duties, these agencies abandoned their lifesaving and life-enhancing platforms when those beliefs conflicted with their contractual responsibilities. In the current era, where laws require killing by even more "humane" methods, these contradictions have become starker.

Increasingly, the practices of both humane societies and municipal animal control agencies are out of step with public sentiment. Today, most Americans hold the humane treatment of animals as a personal value, which is reflected in our laws, cultural practices, the proliferation of organizations founded for animal protection, increased per capita spending on animal care, and great advancements in veterinary medicine. But the agencies that the public expects to protect animals are instead killing more than five million animals annually.

Lifesaving alternatives to the mass killing of animals in shelters have existed for decades. These lifesaving methods are based on innovative, humane, nonlethal programs and services that have proven that the killing can be brought to an end. Too many of these agencies, however, remain mired in the kill philosophies of the past, unwilling to or hampered from exploring and adopting methods that save lives. This is a breach of their public trust, a gross deviation from their responsibility to protect animals, and a point of view that we, as caring people and a humane community, can no longer accept or tolerate.

We assert that a No Kill nation is within our reach—that the killing can and must be brought to an end. It is up to each of us working individually and together to implement sheltering models that have already saved tens of thousands of animals in progressive communities. If we work together—with certainty of purpose, assured of our own success, with the commitment that "what must be done, will be done"—the attainment of our goals will not be far off.

II. No Kill Resolution

Whereas, the right to live is every animal's most basic and fundamental right;

Whereas, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals and other humane organizations were founded to establish standards for humane treatment of animals, to promote their rights, and to protect them from harm;

Whereas, traditional sheltering practices allow the mass killing of sheltered animals;

Whereas, every year shelters in the United States are killing millions of healthy and treatable animals who could be placed in homes, and are also killing millions of feral cats who do not belong in shelters;

Whereas, life always takes precedence over expediency;

Whereas, the No Kill movement in the United States has successfully implemented new and innovative programs that provide alternatives to mass killing;

Whereas, lifesaving change will come about only if No Kill programs are embraced and further developed;

Whereas, failure to implement No Kill programs constitutes a breach of the public's trust in the sheltering community;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that No Kill policies and procedures are the only legitimate foundation for animal sheltering; and,

It is incumbent upon all shelters and animal groups to embrace the philosophy of No Kill, to immediately begin implementing programs and services that will end the mass killing of sheltered animals, and to reject the failed kill-oriented practices of the past.

III. Statement of Rights

We acknowledge the following:

- Sheltered animals have a right to live;
- Feral cats have a right to their lives and their habitats;
- Animals, rescuers, and the public have a right to expect animal protection organizations and animal shelters to do everything in their power to promote, protect, and advocate for the lives of animals;
- Animal protection groups, rescue groups, and No Kill shelters have a right to take into their custody animals who would otherwise be killed by animal shelters;
- Taxpayers and community members have a right to have their government spend tax monies on programs and services whose purpose is to save and enhance the lives of all animals;
- Taxpayers and community members have a right to full and complete disclosure about how animal shelters operate.

IV. Guiding Principles

No Kill is achieved only by guaranteeing the following:

- Life to all healthy animals, and to all sick, injured, or vicious animals where medical or behavioral intervention would alter a poor or grave prognosis;
- The right of feral cats to live in their habitats.

These conditions can be achieved only through adherence to the following:

- Shelters and humane groups end the killing of healthy and treatable animals, including feral cats;
- Every animal in a shelter receives individual consideration, regardless of how many animals a shelter takes in, or whether such animals are healthy, underaged, elderly, sick, injured, traumatized, or feral;
- Shelters and humane organizations discontinue the use of language that misleads the public and glosses over the nature of their actions, such as “euthanasia,” “unadoptable,” “fractious,” “putting them to sleep,” and other euphemisms that downplay the gravity of ending life and make the task of killing easier;
- Shelters are open to the public during hours that permit working people to reclaim or adopt animals during nonworking hours;
- Shelters and other government agencies promote spay/neuter programs and mandate that animals be spayed or neutered before adoption;
- Public shelters work with humane animal adoption organizations to the fullest extent to promote the adoption of animals and to reduce the rate of killing;
- Shelters provide care and treatment for all animals in shelters to the extent necessary, including prompt veterinary care, adequate nutrition, shelter, exercise, and socialization;
- Shelters are held accountable for and make information publicly available about all the animals in their care.

V. No Kill Standards

The implementation of these lifesaving procedures, policies, and programs must be the immediate goal of every shelter, and animal control and animal welfare agency:

- Formal, active commitment by shelter directors, management, and staff to lifesaving programs and policies, and dedication to promptly ending mass killing of shelter animals;
- Immediate implementation of the following programs by all publicly funded or subsidized animal shelters:

- High-volume, low- and no-cost spay/neuter services;
 - A foster care network for underaged, traumatized, sick, injured, or other animals needing refuge before any sheltered animal is killed, unless the prognosis for rehabilitation of that individual animal is poor or grave;
 - Comprehensive adoption programs that operate during weekend and evening hours and include offsite adoption venues;
 - Medical and behavioral rehabilitation programs;
 - Pet retention programs to solve medical, environmental, or behavioral problems and keep animals with their caring and responsible caregivers;
 - Trap-Neuter-Return or Release (TNR) programs;
 - Rescue group access to shelter animals;
 - Volunteer programs to socialize animals, promote adoptions, and help in the operations of the shelter;
 - Documentation before any animal is killed that all efforts to save the animal have been considered, including medical and behavioral rehabilitation, foster care, rescue groups, neuter and release, and adoption.
- An end to the policy of accepting trapped feral cats to be destroyed as unadoptable, and implementation of TNR as the accepted method of feral cat control by educating the public about TNR and offering TNR program services;
 - An end to the use of temperament testing that results in killing animals who are not truly vicious (e.g., shy/timid cats and frightened dogs) but who can be placed in homes, or are feral cats who can be returned or released;
 - Abolishment of trapping, lending traps to the public to capture animals, and support of trapping by shelters, governments, and pest control companies for the purposes of removing animals to be killed;
 - An end to owner-requested killing of animals unless the shelter has made an independent determination that the animal is irremediably suffering or cannot be rehabilitated;
 - The repeal of unenforceable and counter-productive animal control ordinances such as cat licensing and leash laws, pet limit laws, bans on feeding stray animals, and bans on specific breeds.