

Humane Society EUTHANASIA Standard Operating Procedures

Euthanasia is an unfortunate but necessary factor in shelter operations. Below are listed categories of animals and reasons why these animals might be euthanized as identified by the Humane Society of the United States.

CATEGORY	STATUS	EUTHANASIA...
FERAL OR UNSOCIALIZED	Animals that have not been and cannot be handled and do not adjust to the shelter setting	...is generally appropriate for animals with no hope of socialization.
UNWEANED	Animals that are too young to survive on their own or in a shelter setting, needing extensive care and socialization.	...is generally appropriate because of the length of time until maturity, and because immature immune systems cannot protect against diseases common in shelters.
MEDICAL-UNTREATABLE	Animals with a terminal illness or injury, severe chronic illness, or other serious medical condition.	...is appropriate to eliminate ongoing suffering for the animal.
TEMPERAMENT ISSUES/AGGRESSIVENESS	Animals that are showing signs of aggression, have attacked a person or animal, or have failed a temperament evaluation.	...is generally appropriate for humane, safety, ethical, and liability reasons.
KENNEL STRESS	Animals with a marked change in behavior due to stress as a result of an extended stay in the shelter.	...is generally performed for humane reasons to prevent further suffering.
PHYSICAL CONDITION	Animals in general poor overall condition and/or health (for example: old, thin, weak).	...is often the eventual result as these animals are often poor candidates for adoption due to the medical rehabilitation necessary.
BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS	Animals with behavior problems such as inappropriate urination, separation anxiety, etc.	...is generally due to a lack of an appropriate home that will provide a commitment to training, socialization, etc.
MEDICAL-CONTAGIOUS	Animals in good physical condition with a medical condition such as URI, kennel cough or parvovirus that may be treatable but contagious in a shelter environment	...is most often not only because of the symptoms of the illness, but also to prevent contamination of others.

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MEDICAL-TREATABLE	Animals in good physical condition with treatable, non-contagious medical conditions that could be fixed with treatment and/or time.	...is most often a result of lack of resources, space, or time to treat the animal.
ADOPTION POTENTIAL	Animals who, given the space, time, staff, money, or availability of an appropriate home could live well in a new home.	...is most often due to a lack of resources and/or appropriate homes

1. General. Since euthanasia is the final act of kindness that can be shown to an animal, it is the policy of the Humane Society that animals be handled with respect and sensitivity and protected from stress, fear, discomfort, and pain.

2. Implementation Normally euthanasia is conducted in the shelter employing tranquilizing drugs and controlled substances that when administered properly are accepted as the most humane method of ending an animal's life. These drugs can only be administered by a veterinarian licensed in the state of Alabama or by a Certified Euthanasia technician if the shelter is licensed, the technician is licensed and the shelter has a DEA license for the necessary drugs. When euthanasia is dictated by severe medical trauma and that animal would suffer if held in the shelter until the vet comes, then that animal should be transported to the nearest available veterinary clinic.

3. Selection of animals. Shelter animals are selected for euthanasia based on the following criteria, keeping in mind that any selection order of priority may change as circumstances warrant: space, ability to cope in a shelter environment or new home environment, temperament, health, age, condition and length of stay. Animals are evaluated by staff as to known or observed behavior/health issues. There are times when an animal's condition or behavior precludes any evaluation and results in immediate euthanasia.

4. Pre-euthanasia decisions. Prior to euthanasia, kennel staff ensure that there are no special circumstances that may make euthanasia an inappropriate decision for that animal at that time. This involves ensuring the animal is cross checked against lost reports, adoption applications, special holds, etc., to ensure that animal can be euthanized and no mistakes are being made. The director has final say on all euthanasia decisions.

5. Drug Storage. All Schedule III or II drugs will be stored in a safe identified just for those drugs at all times when not in direct use by an authorized and licensed euthanasia technician. The log books to track drug usage will be maintained in the large shelter safe also used for money storage when not in use. Only the authorized and licensed euthanasia technician or the Shelter Director will have access to the safe used to store euthanasia drugs.

6. Preparation for euthanasia

A. Authorized staff will get the necessary drugs and supplies from the office safes and supply room. Since our shelter utilizes work release inmate labor, at NO time will any pre-euthanasia

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drugs, euthanasia drugs, syringes and needles or the log books be left in the Euthanasia Room. These supplies will be accompanied by an authorized staff member at all times and secured

During euthanasia, the treatment room, hallway and adjacent areas should be kept as quiet as possible. Only essential persons should be present during euthanasia.

B. Needle size. The proper size of needle and syringe is dependent upon the size of the animal. It is preferable to use the smallest syringe that can hold the proper amount of drug, as it is easier to hold and manipulate. The needle size should be based on the size of the animal's vein. Typically kittens and cats require a 25-gauge 5/8" needle and dogs, depending upon size, require 18-25 gauge and 1" needle. The 1 1/2" needles are usually used only in determining death by checking for a heartbeat in large dogs after checking for eye reflex and heart sounds.

Needles should be checked for barbs prior to use and should be changed to prevent dulling if more than two insertions are needed. Used needles and syringes are disposed of in a sharps container.

C. Staff presence. Generally euthanasia must be performed by two persons. The handler is responsible for comforting the animal; securing and controlling the animal so it cannot bite; speaking gently using the animal's name, if known; soothing the animal and directing its attention to the handler, rather than to the procedure itself. The second person administers the injection. Only in extenuating circumstances may euthanasia be performed by one person and only if it is safe to do so. Such situations may involve a newborn animal that can be held and injected by one person, or a critically ill or injured animal that must be euthanized immediately to prevent further suffering.

D. Presence of other animals. Only one animal at a time is present in the treatment room. Live animals should not see another animal being euthanized nor should they see a carcass. Only under rare and extenuating circumstances may an exception be made and only if it will make the process easier on the animals. Such an exception may be a litter of newborn animals that are not conscious of what is happening, but are comforted by each other's presence. Care should be taken to keep them from seeing the actual euthanasia by covering the cage with a towel. If a mother animal and her young are to be euthanized, the mother is always first to spare her the anxiety of worrying about what is happening to her babies. If the babies are newborn with their eyes still closed, are nursing and are going to be euthanized with an intra-peritoneal injection, they may be placed against the mother's breast (if she has been euthanized) after being injected and until death occurs since continuing to nurse and being with the mother will comfort them.

7. Euthanasia agent Euthasol or Fatal-Plus is the euthanasia agent used in all normal shelter operations. The preferred method of administration, when at all possible, is intravenously. Intraperitoneal injections are acceptable for infant animals, companion animals other than cats and dogs and wild animals, or in any other case where IV injection is not possible. Intracardiac injections must never be performed on conscious animals. An intracardiac injection may only be used if the animal is completely anesthetized and an intravenous injection is not possible.

8. Pre-Euthanasia Anaesthesia. Ketamine/Xylazine is the shelter's preferred drug pre-mixture for use in anesthetizing domestic animals. All anesthetizing agents are to be administered intramuscularly.

Domestic animals should be anesthetized when necessary, but not routinely. Anesthetizing is needed if the animal is frightened, uncooperative, excessively active or aggressive. Wild animals and feral animals should be anesthetized first, unless they are comatose. Anesthetizing agents may also cause the animal to vomit. If the animal is muzzled, it is essential to carefully monitor the animal and to remove the muzzle if it shows signs of vomiting to prevent it from strangling on its own vomit.

9. Dosage. The proper dosage for Euthasol is 1 cc per five pounds; however, an overdose should always be administered. If necessary, additional dosages will be administered until unconsciousness and death occurs. Adult cats receive 2cc of sodium pentobarbital.

10. Euthanasia procedures. It is virtually impossible to list a direct step-by-step procedure regarding euthanasia since the proper method depends upon several factors, such as the species, age, size, behavior, and medical condition of the animal. However, there are important guidelines, as set forth below, which should be followed.

A. Small and medium-size animals should be placed on a towel on the table, and large animals may be euthanized on the floor.

B. For dogs it is usually preferable to use the vein in the front leg for the intravenous injection. If this is not possible the vein in the outside rear leg may be used. Typically, the rear leg is used in cats; the vein on the inner thigh area should be used.

C. For intravenous injections, in most animals the vein is easily detected by applying pressure to it, by pumping the paw or by wetting the area with alcohol. It is preferable to locate the vein by these methods, as it is much less stressful to the animal. However, if the vein cannot easily be seen in this way, the leg should be shaved using clippers on dogs. Shaving is not usually too upsetting to dogs; however, the clippers should be turned on before touching the animal with them to avoid suddenly frightening the animal. The noise of the clippers does usually cause cats a great deal of anxiety, stress, and fear, and clippers should not be used. With cats, a small area of hair can be cut away with scissors. Animals other than dogs and cats should usually be anesthetized and then shaved.

D. Once the vein has been located, the handler should hold off the vein by slightly rolling it and applying pressure. The technician will then insert the needle into the vein and will aspirate which, if the needle is properly inserted into the vein, will cause blood to appear in the syringe. Once the needle has been inserted, the technician should secure the syringe and tell the handler to release pressure on the vein. The handler will continue to firmly hold the animal's leg to prevent any sudden movement.

E. The technician will then quickly and smoothly inject the Euthasol or Fatal-Plus into the vein, watching carefully to ensure that the vein is not lost or does not 'bubble.' A bubble occurs when the needle comes out of the vein and the solution is injected into the surrounding area. This will be painful to the animal and convulsions may occur depending on how much solution has been injected. If the animal remains calm, the injections should quickly be administered into the vein above the site of the bubble or into the vein in a different leg. If the animal is in pain, stressed, or convulsing, or if another vein cannot be promptly found, anesthetic should be administered quickly.

F. Once the Euthasol or Fatal-Plus is properly injected into the vein, the animal will collapse very quickly. The handler must continue to support the animal, speaking softly and gently caressing the animal as he/she is placed flat on the surface. The animal may remain conscious for a few moments afterwards, so it is very important to continue comforting the animal, periodically checking for consciousness by checking for an eye reflex. Once the animal loses consciousness, breathing and heartbeat may continue for a few minutes.

G. Death is determined by checking for a heartbeat with the stethoscope. The animal is never to be put in the freezer or left alone until death has been verified. Once death is determined the carcass is gently placed into a trash bag and placed in the freezer. Animals that must be tested for rabies (if an internal shelter employee, inmate or volunteer has been bitten or scratched) are labeled and placed in the refrigerator for further processing.

H. Intraperitoneal injections should be used if an intravenous injection is not possible. The injection is made into the center of the abdomen area just below the rib cage. A greater amount of sodium pentobarbital is required for intraperitoneal injections, and the proper amount varies upon the size of the animal.

I. In most cases it will be best to anaesthetize the animal before rendering an intraperitoneal injection. Once the injection is complete, the animal should be placed in a small, covered crate, cage or carrier until death takes place, and then checked for death as described above.

J. Intracardiac injections may be used only after the animal is anesthetized.

11. Disposal. Carcasses are placed in opaque plastic bags and then placed in the freezers in the Euthanasia Room. The freezers are “emptied” and the carcass filled bags are moved via pickup truck to the shelter dumpster twice weekly the night before the scheduled pickup. This is done as close to the end of the day as possible.

12. Drug Record Keeping. The Euthanasia Technician or Veterinarian will ensure accurate recording of the animals euthanized, amount and type of drug used and the date used. These logs will NOT be destroyed under any circumstances and are subject to inspection by the Alabama State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners at any time.

13. Animal Record Keeping. Immediately after euthanasia, the technician will ensure that that animal’s intake record is appropriately noted and that the intake record is given to the PetPoint manager for data entry.