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THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT

How It Protects Your Dog and Cat

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THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT

How It Protects Your Dog and Cat

If you own a dog or cat—or are in the market for one—you may want to know about a Federal law that protects your pet and other animals.

The law sets production standards for breeders that sell dogs and cats.

The law restricts market outlets for stray or stolen dogs and cats.

The law sets transportation requirements for traveling dogs and cats.

And the law sets standards for the treatment of dogs and cats collected at pounds for later use as laboratory animals.

The name of this law is the Animal Welfare Act.

The Animal Welfare Act

Legislation that makes up the Act was enacted by Congress in 1966, 1970, and 1976. These laws protect laboratory animals, exhibition animals, animals raised for sale to pet shops, and traveling animals.

In each segment of the law, abuses of dogs and cats were recognized. Testimony in Congress at various hearings showed that dogs and cats intended for laboratory use sometimes suffered extreme neglect; dogs and cats raised for pets sometimes were mass produced without proper care and treatment; and dogs and cats shipped in commerce sometimes got no more attention than a shipment of machine parts.

The Animal Welfare Act is enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). That Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) regulates activities of animal breeders, dealers, brokers, transportation companies, exhibitors, and research facilities. Exempted from inspection are most retail stores and private individuals who sell dogs and cats directly to pet owners.

All regulated businesses must identify each dog and cat handled and keep written records on their origin, care, and sale. Further, regulated businesses must follow Federal standards for humane care and treatment for dogs and cats in handling, housing, feeding, watering, sanitation, ventilation, shelter from extremes of weather, veterinary care, separation of incompatible animals, and transportation. Violation of these standards can result in suspension or revocation of the person's



license to do business, plus fines and even prison sentences for serious offenses.

Production and Shipment of Puppies and Kittens

Each breeder of dogs and cats for the pet trade has to meet APHIS standards of care and treatment required by the Animal Welfare Act. A breeder has to be licensed. His facilities and animals are inspected by APHIS. And he should not ship puppies or kittens if they are younger than 8 weeks old.

Young animals must be inspected by a licensed veterinarian within 10 days of the time they are shipped, and a health certificate must be prepared showing that they are healthy enough to travel. You may want to see the health certificate when you buy an animal. However, to be sure of the pet's current health, APHIS suggests you have your own veterinarian do a health check right after you make your purchase.

Anyone taking custody of your future pet as it travels to the pet store comes under Federal regulation. This includes brokers who make up shipments and truckers who move puppies and kittens to freight terminals.

The Animal Welfare Act places a special responsibility on the commercial carrier. The carrier's agent must see to it that the animal being shipped is not too young, has a valid health certificate, and travels in an acceptable crate. The carrier also is subject to provisions requiring a dog or cat to be sent by a quick, direct route without exposure to lengthy discomfort. If there

are delays, carriers must provide rest, feed, and water. The law requires standards for airplanes and other vehicles transporting pets — including minimum and maximum temperatures permitted and minimum ventilation required. After arrival, the carrier must notify the pet store to pick up the shipment promptly or arrange to give the animals proper care until they are called for.

Traveling with Your Dog or Cat

The Animal Welfare Act again provides protection for your pet if you take it on a trip by commercial carrier or ship it alone. First of all, you, as the shipper of the pet, must take certain actions or you can't ship the animal.

Like everyone else, you can't ship dogs or cats if they are less than 8 weeks of age. In addition, it is a good idea to have your veterinarian do a preshipment health examination. Federal law does not require a health certificate, but most States do. Then, you should get a sturdy, comfortable, well-ventilated shipping crate that meets Federal standards. And to give the carrier time to find cargo space that meets Federal requirements, you should call well ahead to get your pet a reservation.

After accepting your pet, a carrier must give it the same level of care, treatment, travel environment, and prompt handling required for all traveling dogs and cats. That means, however, that you also must make arrangements to have your pet picked up promptly after arrival, or else the carrier may have to board your pet—at *your* expense.





Markets Restricted for Stolen Pets

Some thieves cruise a neighborhood and “petnap” dogs and cats for later sale as hunting dogs, guard dogs, pets, or laboratory animals. Of course, legitimate dealers don’t want these stolen or stray pets. But the Animal Welfare Act still requires licensed animal dealers to record the name and address of every person selling them a dog or cat. Each animal must be identified individually, and the dealer must put the identifying number and description in his records. The dealer must also keep dogs and cats in his possession for at least 5 days to facilitate trace-back of lost or stolen animals.

Federal inspectors check the accuracy of a dealer’s records by comparing them with records kept by other dealers in the same marketing chain. Because of this recordkeeping system, it is difficult for thieves to sell stolen pets through the commercial market.

Protecting Animals in Research

Surplus dogs and cats brought to a pound generally are destroyed if they aren't adopted. Some, however, are released to animal dealers who supply laboratory animals to research institutions.

Both dealers and research institutions are regulated under the Animal Welfare Act, and they must comply with the Federal standards for the care and treatment of dogs and cats. At research institutions, a veterinarian must supervise animal care, including the appropriate use of pain-killing drugs. Dealers and research institutions are inspected periodically for compliance.

Other Protection for Dogs and Cats

Some dogs and cats that are not pets also are covered by the Animal Welfare Act. Breeders and dealers handling watchdogs and hunting dogs must provide the same care and treatment required of pet breeders and dealers. These dogs must be shipped under USDA's standards of prompt, humane handling.

Handlers of dogs and cats working in animal acts, such as those seen in circuses, are licensed or registered by USDA. In addition to meeting Federal standards of care, regulated exhibitors must see to it that animals are not cruelly trained or overworked.

Another provision of the Animal Welfare Act prohibits dog fighting exhibitions. USDA cooperates with Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies to track down those involved. The Act provides for large fines and heavy prison sentences for those convicted of engaging in or promoting dog fights.

Protecting Pets from Loss or Theft

USDA officials suggest the following to protect your pets:

1. *Provide identification.* Immediately take steps to individually identify your dog or cat. Tattoos are best because they can't get lost and are difficult to alter. Tags on the collar have the advantage of space for clearer, more detailed information. There is nothing wrong with having both tattoos and tags. Also, jot down for later reference your pet's identifying marks, plus its color, breed, and size, and take a clear, closeup color photograph.

2. *Restrain pets.* Keep cats inside. Put dogs outside only in fenced yards or on a leash. Train



dogs to return to your side on verbal command. Keep dogs and cats from roaming by neutering them at the age your veterinarian recommends—usually about 6 months.

3. *Know your allies.* Prepare a list of persons who can help you find a lost or stolen pet, and keep the list handy and up to date. List the phone numbers of local pounds, shelters, and other animal collection centers. Add newspaper offices, radio stations, and TV stations that have lost-and-found departments, as well as police, sheriff, dog warden, and other officials who might help.

4. *Act promptly.* The quicker you start looking for a lost dog or cat, the better. Tracing becomes more difficult as people's memories dim. Search your own neighborhood frequently; then widen your search, calling the "allies" on your list. Spread the identification of your pet and its photograph to bulletin boards and to everyone you ask about your pet.

Don't overlook children in the neighborhood as a source of information; they seem to have an eye open for pets out of place.

5. *Don't give up.* Keep looking for more than a few days. Strays sometimes return to their old neighborhood days—and even weeks—after you first miss them.

Unwanted Pets Pose Problems

Pet ownership is fun, USDA officials say, but it also is a responsibility. Millions of people that

have dogs and cats forget this responsibility. As a result, animal shelters kill a surplus of nearly 13 million dogs and cats each year; another 5 million are abandoned and roam wild. Most die within a year—they starve, catch disease, or are struck by vehicles. While they run loose, however, they may spread disease and bite or scratch the unwary.

So, think ahead to avoid having an unwanted pet on your hands. Don't get a pet unless your family can care for it and unless a specific member of the family takes responsibility. Choose a type and breed of dog or cat that suits your needs—now, and in the future. And get your dog or cat neutered after it is 6 months old, so it won't produce unwanted young.

If you no longer can care for a pet, try to find it another home with people who will care for it properly. If that's impossible, don't just abandon the animal to random death. The most humane alternative is to have a veterinarian end its life painlessly.

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USDA welcomes the cooperation of informed people in enforcing the Animal Welfare Act, and complaints receive first priority for inspection. Persons who know of any apparent violation should contact: Animal Care Staff, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 770 Federal Building, Hyattsville, MD 20782 (telephone: 202/436-8271).

Veterinary Services
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