

ANIMAL SHELTERS IN TENNESSEE

Animal care and control programs encompass much more than rabies control, providing a number of services for communities to protect the safety and health of people, as well as companion animals. However, Tennessee shelters' human and financial resources, staff qualifications, facility conditions, budgets, and governance vary. The number of shelters operating in Tennessee is unknown.



Animal control and sheltering programs handle pet overpopulation issues primarily through housing and caring for homeless and stray animals and protecting communities from dangerous or sick animals. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) estimates the national cost of pet overpopulation to be \$2 billion per year for animal control and care services. Often, animal control and sheltering programs must euthanize the majority of animals they take in. In Tennessee, a sample of 24 animal shelters euthanized 77,022 companion animals in 2006, or 65 percent of the animals they took in.

Conclusions:

- **Tennessee traditionally has treated animal control and sheltering as local issues, primarily supported by local government funds.** As a result, availability and quality vary considerably across the state.
- **Tennessee does not provide state-level guidance for animal control and sheltering or related issues.** Other states require animal sheltering facilities to be registered or licensed and may inspect those facilities. In addition, several states have minimum animal sheltering standards. Tennessee does not require or provide
 - Specific standards of animal care, shelter design or facility procedures
 - Training standards for animal control officers
 - Data reporting from animal shelters
- **Tennessee's spay/neuter law lacks: (1) a definition of "adoption," (2) enforcement mechanisms, and (3) strong consequences for violation.** This may result in numbers of animals remaining unaltered after they leave the shelters.

Recommendations for the General Assembly:

- Grant the State Departments of Agriculture and Health a bigger role in animal shelter oversight.
- Require that animal shelters follow minimum standards.
- Create oversight and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that animal shelters follow minimum standards.
- Require training for animal control officers and shelter personnel.
- Expand funding sources for animal control and sheltering programs.
- Include definitions of terms such as "adoption" and "rescue group" in The Tennessee Spay/Neuter Law, as well as enforcement mechanisms and/or stronger incentives to follow the law.