

5.0 SHELTER OPERATIONS

5.1 GENERAL OPERATIONS

5.11 GENERAL OVERVIEW

In general, animal shelter staff are often overworked and underappreciated by the very communities that are responsible for pet overpopulation and the euthanasia that results. MDPASU is in the very difficult position to accept and house approximately 32,000 homeless animals every year; and even though dealing with this stress, The HSUS team found many of the staff to be caring, compassionate and trying their best with the resources and training provided to them. This said The HSUS team found that overall; shelter operations were disorganized and unstructured.

5.12 HOURS OF OPERATION

Observations:

The North shelter's hours of operation for licensing and rabies vaccination were Monday through Friday 7:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday 7:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Adoption and redemption hours were Monday through Friday 11:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. It is appropriate that adoption hours do not begin until staff has had a chance to clean the areas which the public visits.

The shelter is closed on major holidays. MDPASU should be commended for providing ample opportunity for the public to visit the shelter in the evenings and on weekends when a majority of the working public are able.

The HSUS team found different information regarding the shelter's hours. For example, information on the front doors and "helpful information" flyer stated the shelter's adoption hours are until 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and until 4:30 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday; the Web site and phone recording stated 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

The HSUS team was told that the front gates are closed in the evening after the shelter closes. The HSUS team was also told that animals are accepted 24 hours a day, but when asked about citizens with emergencies or stray animals showing up at the shelter after hours, The HSUS team was told that the citizen must call the police non-emergency number and that the police will contact the shelter. However, neither the police non-emergency number nor instructions on what to do were provided on signs outside the gate.

The South Dade facility maintained operational hours of 7:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, and was closed on Sunday and Monday.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Close the North shelter at least one day each week, preferably Wednesday, to allow for more thorough cleaning and “catch-up” time for staff. This should not prevent people from relinquishing animals.
- ✓ Continue to receive and assist animals 24 hours a day and offer an emergency pick-up service, if possible (See section 3.2, External and Directional Signage).
- ✓ Ensure that all MDPASU information regarding hours of operation are consistent. This should include brochures and flyers, signage, the phone recording, and the Web site.

5.13 TELEPHONE SYSTEM

Observations:

The existing telephone system consisted of 15-18 incoming lines. There were additional lines recently added to help accommodate the huge number of calls coming into the shelter. All lines came to the front desk where they were routed to the appropriate person or department. According to staff, if the person the call is transferred to does not answer, that call is bounced back to the front desk. However, front desk staff is not aware that the call has been bounced back and callers often have to hold for long periods of time resulting in frustration.

During the site visit, the dispatcher checked voice mail every few minutes to ensure a timely response to all incoming calls for service. According to one staff member, the dispatch area receives an average of 600 calls per week. Many of these calls did not require response from the field unit but rather were people calling for services that were not provided by MDPASU.

MDPASU was in the process of installing a 311 system that would help “weed out” these kinds of calls and which would also minimize the amount of time spent by dispatchers on calls that are not related to MDPASU. The 311 system will be maintained by the Miami-Dade Police Department.

Night time personnel answered incoming calls on the police emergency line after normal hours of operation. Staff calls a supervisor if an emergency exists. There was a recorded message that is delivered to the public during closed hours for non-emergency situations (See section 9.5, Customer/ Client Service).

There was a public announcement (PA) system set up through the phone system; however, it only worked in the office areas, not the animal housing areas. There was a bell that rang in the back of the shelter if assistance was needed up front or if someone in the back needed to handle a phone call. There were no telephones located in the West Wing.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Key staff should be provided with hand held radios to increase the ability to communicate internally.

- ✓ Install a telephone line in the West Wing. Staff who work in this rather isolated part of the shelter should also be equipped with hand held radios.
- ✓ Research ways to address the issue of calls being bounced back up to the front office staff without their knowledge. This may mean investing in a phone system that notifies front office staff when a call has been bounced back to them allowing them to give that caller priority service.

5.14 COMPUTER SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT

Observations:

The computer system was networked internally but not with other county departments. There was no internal IT person; however, several staff had some computer expertise and could help troubleshoot minor problems. For more complicated issues, MDPASU had to consult with an IT person via the Miami-Dade help desk. The HSUS team could not confirm if or how often backup was conducted.

Recommendations:

- ✓ As reliance on computers grows, hire an IT person for the shelter so that computer issues/problems can be addressed quickly and appropriately.
- ✓ Backup should be conducted on a daily basis.

5.15 GENERAL RECORD KEEPING/ SHELTER STATISTICS

Observations:

MDPASU did not have SOPs for record keeping or the use of the Chameleon software program. The HSUS team found record keeping inaccurate and ineffective.

MDPASU used the Chameleon animal shelter management software package, which is excellent; however, only a fragment of Chameleon's capabilities were being utilized. Staff told The HSUS team that a few officers went to Chameleon training off-site but other staff had to learn by trial and error. The HSUS team was told that training is essentially non-existent and that citizens are getting citations in error because there is no consistency in how things are done and mistakes are being made.

Basic monthly and annual reports are generated and were provided to The HSUS team; however, there is a question about the accuracy of these reports due to the major discrepancies in the kennel inventory reports. During the site visit, The HSUS team asked to have a daily kennel inventory of animals printed out. The HSUS team then compared the animals on the list to the animals actually in the shelter and found that a large number of animals were not in the cages or kennels that were listed on the kennel inventory. And in many instances a different animal was in the cage instead, for example, cage B18 was listed on the kennel inventory as housing a black "domestic shorthair" cat when in actuality, there was a tan and white dog in the cage with no

cage card. This is only one example of many.

During the site visit, The HSUS team reviewed several reports. A review of a daily intake report indicated that for the first three hours of the shelter being open; it had only received 11 animals, which could not be accurate according to the staff person who generated the report. However, nothing was done to research or correct this discrepancy. This report was generated in June when intakes are typically very high.

The April report indicated that 44 animals died at the shelter and 69 were missing. The May report indicated that 59 died at the shelter and 39 were missing. Reasons for death were not listed. The HSUS team was not provided with any clear explanation of where missing animals could be but were told that a few of the animals may have died in transit to the shelter (See section 10.23, Equipment/ Vehicles/ Uniforms).

The input of relevant information into individual animal's records was lacking. During the site visit an American bulldog mix was moved to the West Wing because he had attacked and injured his kennelmate in N Ward. The HSUS team made note that after being moved the dog was not given a cage card; nothing was noted on his kennel that he was dog aggressive; and no notes were input into Chameleon as to his behavior or the injection of antibiotic he received. Another dog could have been put in the West Wing kennel with him or he could have been adopted to someone with another dog. This type of oversight appeared to be common.

See section 6.1, General Shelter Medicine/ Health Care for information on medical record keeping.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Develop and implement clear SOPs regarding all aspects of record keeping including the use of Chameleon to include data entry pertaining to vaccinations, veterinary examinations, medical treatments, behavioral observations, drug and supply inventories, field operations, animal dispositions, and generating various related reports such as monthly and yearly statistics.
- ✓ Consider contacting other sheltering organizations that use Chameleon to find out how they utilize the program and what works or doesn't work for them. Utilizing Chameleon will help to make MDPASU's work more well-organized and accurate.
- ✓ All staff that uses Chameleon should be fully trained in its use.
- ✓ Immediately begin using a kennel inventory report to conduct a daily morning census. This should be done by physically matching the animal I.D with the number on the animal's collar and making sure the animal is in the correct cage or kennel. Any discrepancies should be immediately reported to a supervisor and appropriately resolved. Once record keeping is more accurate, this can be done less frequently.
- ✓ If not already done, submit monthly and annual reports to the assistant county manager charged with overseeing MDPASU. This information can be used to educate the county

manager's office about the problems faced by MDPASU and also enlighten them on the tremendous workload associated with running an animal care and control program.

- ✓ Begin tracking more comprehensive intermediate level shelter statistics¹⁸ which include the following (This can be done with Chameleon):

Number of animals received/entered the shelter:

A. Species

1. Dogs
 - a. Adults
 - b. Puppies (<6 months)
2. Cats
 - a. Adults
 - b. Kittens (<6 months)
3. Other
 - a. Domestic and exotic
 - Rodents
 - Rabbits
 - Avian
 - Caged birds
 - Uncaged birds
 - Poultry
 - Reptiles
 - Amphibians
 - Ferrets
 - Livestock (e.g. cattle, pigs, sheep, horses)
 - b. Exotic/Wildlife
 - Primates
 - Non-native wild animals
 - Exotic cats
 - c. Native Wildlife
 - d. Other

B. Method of Entry (Where did they come from?)

1. Owner surrendered
 - a. Method
 - Turned in at shelter
 - Turned over to and picked up by staff
 - b. Euthanasia requested due to
 - Age
 - Illness/injury
 - Behavior
 - Other

18 "Intermediate Shelter Statistics" provided by the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy

2. Adoption returned within 30 days to shelter
3. Running-at-large/stray
 - a. Found and turned in at shelter by general public
 - b. Picked up in field by staff
 - Captured at large by staff
 - Trapped
 - Found and turned over to staff by general public
4. Transfers (e.g. other shelters, organizations, institutions)
5. DOA
6. Seizures/confiscations
7. In-house births
8. Other

Number of animals leaving:

A. Species

1. Dogs
 - a. Adults
 - b. Puppies (<6 months)
2. Cats
 - a. Adults
 - b. Kittens (<6 months)
3. Other
 - a. Domestic and exotic
 - Rodents
 - Rabbits
 - Avian
 - Caged birds
 - Uncaged birds
 - Poultry
 - Reptiles
 - Amphibians
 - Ferrets
 - Livestock (e.g. cattle, pigs, sheep, horses)
 - b. Exotic/Wildlife
 - Primates
 - Non-native wild animals
 - Exotic cats
 - c. Native Wildlife
 - d. Other

B. Method of disposition (What happened to them?)

1. Returned to owner
 - a. Dogs
 - b. Cats
 - c. Other

2. Placed/adopted
 - a. New home
 - Dogs
 - Cats
 - Other
 - b. Foster home
 - Dogs
 - Cats
 - Other
3. Euthanized
 - a. At request of owner
 - Dogs
 - Cats
 - Other
 - b. Healthy Euthanized
 - Dogs
 - Cats
 - Others
 - c. Euthanized for Medical, Age or Physical condition
 - Dogs
 - Cats
 - Others
4. Transferred
5. DOA disposal
6. Other (e.g. died at shelter, missing, escaped)

- ✓ When reporting statistics to the community, emphasize that the burden of responsibility for pet overpopulation must be shared by all members of the community. For example, rather than stating that “Miami-Dade Police Animal Services Unit handled XX stray and homeless animals in 2004,” management should instead accentuate the public’s role in shelter numbers through language such as “Miami-Dade County generated XX stray and homeless animals in 2004.”

Discussion:

Like most businesses, animal sheltering agencies are expected to maintain accurate records regarding their activities. This includes, but is not limited to the accurate accounting of all animals received and their corresponding dispositions. An accurate and easy-to-use data collection and analysis system is essential for reporting such information to donors, local government and other funding sources. In addition, such reporting is essential for assessing the organization’s performance, formulating strategic plans and setting goals.

Some of the statistical information provided by MDPASU was nothing short of alarming. The high incidence of animals dying at the shelter is of great concern. Given the noted inconsistencies in record keeping practices, it is impossible to determine whether these numbers are accurate. However, given the extent of disease in the shelter, lack of effort to identify or treat illnesses, failure to isolate sick animals and the overall inattention to the animals it is feasible these numbers could be on target.

"What" you do is important and need not be overshadowed by "how much" you do. It is often stated that quality is more important than quantity; therefore you can and should put numbers to work for you in ways to improve the quality of what you do.

All sizes of shelters benefit from keeping accurate statistics on every aspect of their work. Numbers tell people who you are and what you are up against. Presented here are reasons to keep an accurate count of the animals you handle.

Accountability

Numbers will justify your existence to a Board of Directors, government entities, and the general public. You know you are productive, but they must know that as well.

Liability

Proper recording of numbers will show you kept each animal the legally required time.

Public Image

Numbers will increase public awareness of the magnitude of your mission. Numbers help you convey the results of your efforts.

Budgets/Fundraising

A good budgeting process requires statistics to identify needs. Numbers assist in planning for the future. Numbers paint pictures that open pocketbooks for donations.

Program Evaluation/Planning

Strengths and weaknesses are exposed through statistics. Analysis of your numbers will identify successful as well as ineffective programs. Statistical analysis can assist in the design of future programs. Comparison of statistics may expose animal population trends (local, regional, and national).

5.16 INCOMING ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION AND PROCEDURES

Observations:

MDPASU had limited SOPs regarding animal intake procedures. Animals brought in by the public were processed through a separate entrance to the left of the main lobby (See Fig. 16). Very basic information including an animal description and date of intake was recorded in Chameleon, but no personality or behavioral information for the animal was recorded. Some of the recorded information was misleading, for example staff often listed themselves as the source of the animal and used the shelter address instead of recording the information of the person who brought the animal to the shelter and the location at which the animal was found.

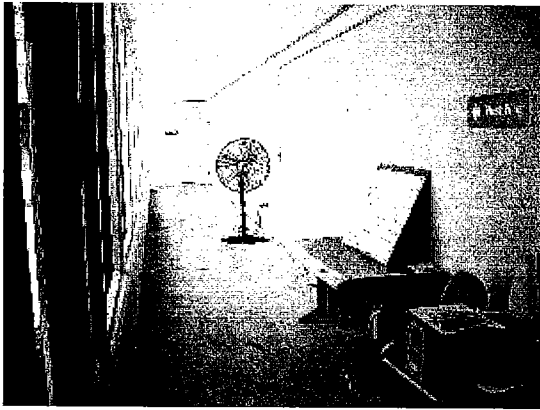


Figure 16

The fee to surrender an owned animal was \$15. Once the animal was handed over, the owner was required to go to the main counter in the lobby and pay the \$15 and have their animal's record removed from the system so they don't get license updates, etc. in the future.

Animals were not routinely scanned for microchips at intake, which was observed throughout the entire site visit. A stray Labrador retriever was brought in to the shelter on 6/11/04. Six days after the dog arrived at the shelter he was scanned and a microchip was found. The dog's owner was contacted and was to pick the dog up the next day. If this dog had gotten sick during his stay he could have been euthanized after his five day hold period. In addition, this dog spent six days taking up valuable kennel space that could have been used to house a truly homeless dog.

After an animal's information was recorded, a blue or red collar was stapled on the animal and the animal was either placed in one of the receiving cages or tethered to the fence (See Fig. 17). Some staff said red collars meant the animal was a biter or dangerous and blue collars meant adoptable, but others said the colors didn't matter. The SOPs stated that blue is indicative of a non-aggressive animal and red is indicative of an aggressive animal. The collars had the animals impound number and the date written on them. Although the system needs improvement, MDPASU should be commended for using collars to identify animals in the facility.



Figure 17

The process of tethering animals to the fence needs to be re-evaluated. On one occasion a dog which had been relinquished and tied to the chain link fence by staff, chewed through the nylon leash and escaped. This escape occurred after one staff member warned another that he was trying to chew through his leash. Had this dog been aggressive it could have been a serious situation with a high potential for injury to other animals and people (See section 6.3, Isolation and Separation).

Once the staff had a moment, the animal was moved from the receiving kennels or was un-tethered from the fence and placed basically where ever there was room. If the staff person working receiving thought the animal looked sick he would go in B Ward or the kennels designated for sick animals in N Ward. There was no consistent system for housing the animals after intake.

Animal information sheets printed out from Chameleon were being used for cage cards; however, they were not consistently attached to the cages and kennels and often the paperwork was with the wrong animal. Some of them were placed in plastic sheaths and some were just placed between the bars of the cage. The cage cards listed basic information such as the animal's ID, age/sex, breed, color, intake date, stray or owner surrender, due out date, and if the animal was on hold or adopted. Although the cage cards listed the kennel number that the animal was supposed to be in, the cages in the wards were not marked well. Some had numbered stickers and others had engraved tags. The kennels in the West wing were marked well. There were many occasions during the site visit when cage cards for animals could not be located and it was not uncommon for them to be found lying on the floor.

A majority of the animals did not have their pictures taken for their records at intake even though Chameleon offers a Cham-cam that can be used to take pictures of animals at the time of intake.

One example of the intake procedure was a dog named Daisy who was being surrendered by her owner's son because she unintentionally knocked down the elderly owner by jumping up on him. The man stated that Daisy is very friendly, play bites, and is spayed and up to date on vaccinations. Staff entered the man's name and address into Chameleon; however, no information about the dog's condition or behavior was entered. After the man left, staff entered that Daisy was not spayed, so an HSUS team member told staff that the man said she is spayed in order to prevent Daisy from having to go under anesthesia and have unnecessary surgery to find out she is spayed. Daisy was given a blue collar with the date and her impound number and she was taken directly to N Ward and put in a kennel with two similar sized female dogs. Daisy was not given an intake examination because staff explained that the veterinarian only looks at the animals if receiving staff "sees something" (See section 6.5, Incoming Animal Examinations and Assessments).

On the last day of the site visit a staff member stopped someone outside of the building and "adopted" the puppy he was bringing in to relinquish. Apparently, not an isolated incident, some staff take animals directly from people outside the building instead of adopting them from the shelter. A different staff member approached The HSUS team after this happened for our opinion because he was discussing with another staff member whether or not this was appropriate.