

Mitigating Risk for Rescues and Shelters

Written and compiled by Bonney Brown



Risk Management Guidelines from Animal Welfare Organization Insurance Program (AWOIP)

10 Factors for Every Animal Shelter's Risk Management Plan:

1. All staff members and volunteers are required to undergo initial training and orientation before working with animals.
2. Protective gear worn while working or interacting with animals.
3. Security procedures outlined and displayed for kennel areas and their entrances.
4. Feeding procedures for serving animals displayed and reviewed with every staff member and volunteer.
5. Ensure proper management and maintenance of facility, including lighting, water, waste, etc.
6. Security equipment installation and monitoring to protect the shelter, its animals, staff members, volunteers, and visitors, including video cameras for fencing, entrance, exit doors, etc.
7. Emergency evacuation procedures and periodic drills for natural disasters such as fire, flood, or any other natural disaster, including security breaches that place animals, staff members, volunteers or visitors in danger.
8. Mandate immediate reporting of risk factors to immediate supervisory staff, including animal cruelty, safety violations, and security non-compliance.
9. Develop safety procedures regarding animals, staff members, and others.
10. Discuss, distribute, and periodically review all shelter policies and procedures with all staff and volunteers, e.g., staff and volunteer handbooks.

Assessing Risk for Your Organization

The matrix on the last page of this document can help guide decisions about what levels of risk are acceptable and where to put time and energy into risk mitigation for your organization.

Key Elements of a Risk Management Plan Implementation

- Orientation of new staff/volunteers.
- Periodic/ongoing training for staff and volunteers (including foster caregivers).
- Written policies, procedures, and/or processes.
- Dissemination of information/policies, online library or handbook of most current versions of all key documents.
- Monitoring compliance with safety-related policies, looking for and addressing potential hazards
- Updating policies and procedures periodically.
- Safety officer or committee.

Key Topic Areas to Address in a Risk Management Plan

Safety of Staff, Volunteer, and the Public

- Animal handling. Implement safe and humane handling practices.

- Zoonotic disease transmission. Training and processes for spotting and reporting animal health issues that could result in spread of infection in foster or adoptive homes.
- Disease transmission between animals. Same as above. Prevent pets being infected by a foster pet or newly adopted pet.
- Interactions at adoption events between animals and the public. May include policies such as: dogs must be leashed or in a crate at all times; all interactions with the public and animals will be supervised; animals will be current on vaccinations; and cats will be removed from cages or carriers only in a secure area.
- Required reporting and process for documenting and managing treatment of bites and other injuries for staff, volunteers, and the public. Also required reporting for any signs of aggression in an animal so it can be promptly addressed.
- Skilled people handling difficult animals. Ensure that hard-to-handle animals are handled only by appropriately skilled and trained people.
- Proper equipment. Secure safe crates and carriers with working latches, nets, and gloves for cat handling, squeeze cage and/or humane trap, a rabies pole, bite stick if staff is trained, air horn and other tools to break up dog fights. Having proper tools prevents people doing things they should not with their bare hands. Training for how to break up dog fights is advised if there will be playgroups.

Health Care of the Animals

- Veterinary exams and treatment. Prompt veterinary exam of all new pets.
- Timely vaccination of animals, especially for Rabies (zoonotic) and infectious diseases between animals.
- Identifying common signs of illness (zoonotic and animal to animal). Training, observation, reporting, and treatment for all animal care staff and volunteers.
- Full disclosure of any health or behavioral concerns with foster caregivers and adopters.

Admissions/Intake

- Intake protocols. Selection of suitable animals to prevent taking in dangerously aggressive dogs. Working with partners to obtain a complete behavioral history including any signs of dog-to-dog or dog-to-human aggression or bites.
- Aggressive dogs. Admission selection guidelines, adoption, and euthanasia decision guidelines, and obtaining and reviewing history.
- Handling of new animals coming into the organization. Selecting foster caregivers who are able to manage the animal's needs and training to enable less skilled caregivers to manage an animal's needs.

Transport

- Safe transport practices that fit with industry standards to prevent accidents that could impact human and animal safety or animal interactions that endanger people or other animals.
- Loading and unloading protocols that prevent injuries and limit risk of animal escape.

Facility

- Appropriate clothing and protective attire for working with animals and cleaning chemicals (e.g., closed-toe shoes, PPE around animals suspected of having a zoonotic disease).

- Appropriate temporary housing that keeps species separate from each other and secure from escape.
- Cleaning protocols for crates, carriers, and the facility including chemicals to use, proper dilution, and cleaning process (process, training, and monitoring).
- Security for the facility, access to protect staff/volunteers and animals, security cameras, controlled access to areas where animals are housed. Veterinary medication, money, checks, and donor records are kept secure to prevent theft.
- Facility safety hazards identified and addressed quickly. Tripping and other facility hazards, appropriate lighting, doors for safety, and waste disposal.
- Emergency process and procedures for evacuation taking into account risks or natural disasters which are most likely for your community.
- Signage and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). Access to water and an eye wash station and staff training in proper response to chemical exposure.
- Safety officer and/or committee. Making safety part of someone's specific job responsibilities can enhance compliance. Having a safety committee can reduce insurance costs with some carriers.

Administrative

- Insurance. Appropriate insurance policies in place. Helpful article on this topic: <https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/animal-rescue-insurance>.

