

non-emergency

RELOCATION OF DOGS AND CATS FOR ADOPTION WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Best practices

Animal welfare organizations may be involved in transporting animals locally, regionally and nationally across the United States and territories. The term “animal transport” typically is used to describe programs in which animals are physically moved over some distance and ownership is transferred from one organization or individual to another. The recommendations in this document apply regardless of the purpose, distances, or parties involved. Careful management and planning are always required to ensure an animal’s comfort and safety and to minimize the risk of disease transmission.

For many animals, relocation is a life-saving measure. But it also may pose risks:

- Animal relocation programs have the potential to spread infectious diseases along transport corridors and to new destinations.
- The stress of transport may increase an animal’s susceptibility to infection, increase viral shedding, or exacerbate behavioral conditions.
- Risk of exposure to infectious disease increases when animals from multiple sources are transported together.

In addition to affecting individual animals, relocation programs may impact animals at the source and destination in both positive and negative ways. For that reason, it’s important to carefully consider risks and benefits for all animals affected by a relocation program. Careful planning minimizes risks. Well-planned transport programs can be very successful in ensuring positive outcomes for relocated animals without displacing others in the community.

This document is not intended to address disaster situations specifically, but the practices described here should be met whenever possible. Best practices for emergency evacuation and transportation of owned pets have been described by the National Alliance of State Animal and Agricultural Emergency Programs (NASAAEP).

While responsible relocation of dogs and cats for adoption can facilitate the placement of these animals into good homes, relocation should not be viewed as a substitute for local governments enacting and enforcing appropriate, effective, and humane policies to address the at-risk and homeless animals in the source communities.



REASONS FOR RELOCATING ADOPTABLE PETS

A real or perceived shortage of a certain type of dog or cat available for adoption in one location creates a demand for puppies, kittens, dogs, and/or cats that may outstrip the local supply. In some situations, shortages may be the result of successful spay and neuter efforts intended to reduce the unwanted dog and cat population, resulting in fewer adoptable animals in the community. In other cases, puppies, kittens, dogs, or cats may be available locally, but good communication or transportation is needed to get the animals from under-resourced communities to locations where adoptions can occur. Animal relocation can change the population dynamics in both the source and destination organizations by increasing the number and variety of animals available for adoption.

Shelters that use relocation programs to transfer out dogs or cats can increase the opportunities for adoption and reduce the number of animals they euthanize due to local overpopulation. Animal transport also can free up valuable resources (e.g., money and staff) to improve care for dogs and cats left behind and implement more proactive measures aimed at reducing pet overpopulation and homelessness.

Shelters that transfer in dogs or cats through relocation programs can benefit from increased variety in animals available for adoption, positive publicity, and increased traffic to the shelter. This can also attract additional resources, allowing for greater impact on both source and destination communities and an overall increase in both animals and people served.

METHODS OF RELOCATION

In addition to shelter-to-shelter relocations, other programs have emerged that move dogs and cats around the United States. These range from informal, volunteer, grassroots efforts, to commercial operations that profit from the sale of animals under the semblance of adoption. Animals may be moved by road using commercial animal transporters, by volunteers driving privately owned vehicles, or by air. There is no unified system in place to track the number of dogs and cats being relocated for adoption purposes.

In all circumstances, humane care must be provided to protect the physical and behavioral health and welfare of every animal being transported. Public health and safety also must be primary concerns, and all participants in the relocation process must follow all local, state, and federal regulations.

SELECTION OF DOGS AND CATS FOR RELOCATION

Good relocation programs do not transport dogs or cats that pose a significant risk of transmitting infectious diseases to the destination facility or community, or those that pose a public health risk because of aggression or zoonotic disease. They carefully screen animals for infectious diseases and aggressive behavior before they are allowed to travel. They also provide

vaccinations, parasite treatment and prevention, and other needed medical treatment before transport.

Decisions about the timing of transport should involve a risk assessment for both the destination and source shelters, and should take into consideration both the risk of holding animals and infectious disease concerns. In addition, responsible programs do not transport dogs and cats whose welfare will likely suffer during the process (e.g., near-term pregnant animals, injured or arthritic animals, particularly anxious animals) unless life-saving resources and opportunities are available at the destination.

Veterinarians, as experts in animal health and welfare, should be consulted in setting organizational criteria for animals eligible for relocation. Destination organizations should accept returns of animals whose original placement does not succeed, and should work with adopters if infectious diseases or behavioral problems emerge soon after adoption.



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Choosing which dogs and cats to transport can be complex. For example, selecting dogs based on lowest risk for heartworm disease (e.g., 8 weeks of age and already receiving heartworm prevention) may be at odds with choosing dogs that are safest to transport when considering viral diseases. Puppies and kittens may be more resilient to the emotional stressors of transport and therefore seem to be the best candidates, but they are the most immunologically naïve and at risk for infectious disease transmission.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTICIPATING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Overarching responsibilities

- Relocation should be a collaboration between the source and destination organizations, should positively impact the animals and communities of both agencies in both the short and long term, and should contribute to long-term humane solutions to overpopulation in the source community.
 - Clear, direct communication is essential among those involved in any transport program. There should be a designated coordinator at both ends of the transport.
 - Written guidelines that all parties can agree to should be developed and reviewed regularly.
 - Standard operating protocols should address medical and behavioral selection criteria, as well as transportation and destination requirements.
- Standard operating protocols should establish steps for minimizing disease exposure at both the source and destination, and for clear and timely communication regarding infectious disease outbreaks.
 - Both parties should maintain record-keeping systems of sufficient detail so that an animal can be traced back to its origin.
 - A contact person must be identified at each transfer point.
 - Plans must be in place for provision of emergency care during transport.
 - For interstate transport, current rabies vaccination is an import requirement for dogs over a legally specified age in all states within the United States. Legal requirements for cats vary by state; in states that do not expressly require vaccination, it is important to recognize that local ordinances may apply.
 - More information on rabies vaccination requirements can be found on the AVMA website. Transporters and attending veterinarians are encouraged to contact state regulatory authorities directly to ensure that up-to-date information is used.
 - A valid Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI, or health certificate) is also required by most jurisdictions if animals are being relocated across state lines.



- Transporters must be familiar with the import requirements for all destinations. In the United States, these usually are regulated by each receiving state's agriculture and/or health department.
- Many airlines have specific requirements for transporting animals. Obtain information from each individual carrier.
- Animals in relocation programs should be spayed or neutered, unless medically contraindicated, to ensure they do not further contribute to the problem of unwanted companion animals. This should occur prior to release by the destination organization.
 - Depending on the specific circumstances and available resources, spay-neuter may be performed at the source or the destination.
 - If spay-neuter is performed at the source, animals must be sufficiently recovered from those procedures before transport. In no case should animals be transported less than 24 hours after any anesthetic or surgical procedure.
- Health records, health certificate, rabies certificate, and other pertinent records should accompany each animal.
- Animals should be fitted with an appropriate form of visual identification such as a collar or tag. Permanent identification with a tattoo or microchip is also recommended.
- To minimize the risk of infectious disease and optimize welfare, animals should be in good health at the time of transport.
 - Transportation of ill animals may be justified in some cases when life-saving resources, such as medical care and placement opportunities, are available at the destination; when measures can be taken during transport to provide for their comfort, health, and safety; and when transportation is permitted by applicable laws and regulations or prior approval of the state veterinarian.

Responsibilities at the point of origin

- The source organization should have a comprehensive preventive healthcare program.
 - Animals destined for transport must be vaccinated prior to or upon intake with core vaccinations for shelter animals.
 - Vaccination should not occur on the day of transport. Ideally it should be done at least 3-5 days prior, to allow for the full onset of protection.
 - Animals destined for transport should be treated for internal and external parasites.
- In addition to any examinations required by state or federal transportation regulations, all animals being transported should receive a medical examination within 24 hours of transport.
 - This examination may be performed by a trained animal care professional or a veterinarian. A trained animal care professional is an individual under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or one whose level of expertise has been assessed by a licensed veterinarian and deemed to be sufficient to conduct the stated examination and indicated treatments.
 - Any abnormalities found during the examination should be disclosed to the destination organization prior to transport. If transport is approved, documentation of the abnormalities should be sent with the animal.
- The animal's health and behavior status should be accurately described and communicated in advance of transport.



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- All dogs 6 months of age and older should be tested for heartworm disease prior to transport.
- All dogs should be started on macrocyclic lactone therapy prior to transport.
- When transport cannot be postponed, dogs with positive results of a heartworm test should be treated with topical moxidectin or a macrocyclic lactone along with a topical canine insecticide.
 - All heartworm-positive dogs should be started on doxycycline therapy prior to transport.
- Dogs should not be transported within 30 days of receiving heartworm adulticidal therapy with melarsomine dihydrochloride.

RESPONSIBILITIES DURING ROAD TRANSPORT

Vehicles

- Vehicles must, at minimum, be operated in compliance with federal or local statutes, recognizing that these regulations may not be sufficient to ensure animal safety and welfare.
- Regardless of legal applicability, the Animal Welfare Act and Regulations should be adhered to by all individuals and organizations engaged in animal relocation.
 - Ambient temperatures during transport should not fall below 45°F for more than four consecutive hours. However a limit of 60°F (15.5°C) may be more suitable for some animals, especially animals with short-hair coats, pediatric and elderly animals, those not acclimated to cooler temperatures, or those otherwise vulnerable.
 - Temperatures should not exceed 85°F (29.5°C) for more than four consecutive hours.
 - Relative humidity should be kept between 30% and 70%.
 - Special precautions may be required for transporting brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds of dogs and cats.
- A thermometer should be placed in the animal area of the vehicle at animal level and where it's easily visible. An additional automated thermostat sensor that alerts the driver of temperature shifts may be a useful tool.
- Fresh air that is free of vehicle exhaust fumes must be ensured at all times.
- The vehicle, including the cargo space, should be heated and cooled when necessary for normal thermoregulation.
 - Consideration should be given to insulating the vehicle floor to minimize heat generated from the engine.
- Placing unconfined or tethered animals in the back of an open pickup truck for transport is unacceptable. It also is illegal in many jurisdictions.
- Particular attention must be paid to provision of shade, as the temperature in a vehicle parked in full sun can rapidly become too high, even when outdoor temperatures are comfortable.

Animal enclosures

- Animals must be provided with adequate space, a comfortable environment, and good air quality.
- Primary enclosures must be large enough for animals to stand and sit upright, to turn around freely while standing, and to lie in a natural position.
- If more than one animal is in the primary enclosure, there must be enough space for each occupant to lie down comfortably at the same time.
- Unfamiliar animals must not be transported together in the same primary enclosure.
- Crates and cages must not be stacked upon each other in a manner that increases animal stress and discomfort, compromises ventilation, allows waste material to fall from the cage above into the cage below, interferes with care and observation, or hinders emergency removal.
- The enclosure and its positioning must allow the animal to be clearly visible at all times.
- The enclosure must be sturdy and permit adequate ventilation.
- There should be no sharp edges.
- Flooring must prevent injury, discomfort, and leakage of fluids.
- Absorbent bedding should be provided with consideration to ambient temperature (e.g., avoid heavy blankets in the summer).
- Animals must be safely and securely confined within the enclosure.
 - Doors on primary enclosures must be secured to prevent accidental opening.
 - Primary enclosures must be secured to prevent movement within the vehicle during transport.
- Each primary enclosure must be positioned in the animal cargo space in a manner that provides protection from the weather and temperature extremes.

Responsibilities of the transporter

- The vehicle driver(s) or animal attendant(s) must have sufficient training in animal health, welfare and safety to recognize and respond to animal needs during transport.
- All transports should be staffed with sufficient personnel to appropriately handle and care for all animals. Transporting organizations should strive to comply with state and federal transportation guidelines.

- Factors to consider when staffing transports:
 - Distance
 - Number of animals being transported
 - Species being transported
 - Weather and time of year
- Drivers (including volunteers, staff, or contracted drivers) should be adequately trained and travel with cell phones, maps/GPS, and emergency equipment.
- Emergency back-up plans should be made in advance for all transport routes.
 - Organizations should have an agreed contingency plan to address weather, mechanical, or other unexpected situations.
- Unless unexpected and unavoidable safety or road conditions dictate otherwise, drivers should avoid sudden acceleration and deceleration, or excessive lateral movement (cornering), noise or vibration.
- Care should be taken to minimize loading and unloading time and to prevent prolonged exposure to ambient temperature and the elements. Animal enclosures should be set and necessary paperwork completed prior to loading and unloading.
- Efforts should always be made to transport animals for the shortest distance and least amount of time possible. Risks to animal health and welfare increase with the length of the journey.
- USDA/APHIS regulations for licensed transporters should be followed by all transporters, even if they aren't licensed and subject to these regulations.
 - The driver or animal attendant should observe dogs and cats as often as circumstances allow, but not less than once every four hours.
 - During observations, animals should be watered and fed, and the transport area cleaned as appropriate.
- Adult dogs should be provided with the opportunity to exercise and eliminate at least once every 12 hours while confined to the transport vehicle (including load time).
- Maximum transport time to an intermediate or final destination should include no more than 14 hours confined to the transport vehicle (including load time).
- Trips that exceed 14 hours must be broken up with an overnight rest stop at an intermediary location, and animals must be allowed the opportunity to exercise and eliminate outside of the transport vehicle during that stop.
- Animals should not be left unattended in a transport vehicle, regardless of HVAC, for more than one hour.
- Food must be provided at least every 24 hours for adults and at least every 12 hours for animals less than 16 weeks of age.
- Caregivers are charged with providing for the individual nutritional needs of the animals. Requirements for food and water may be increased during transport, compared to normal nutritional needs. Veterinary guidance regarding the timing and intervals for feeding should be sought prior to transport.
- If water is not available at all times, it must be provided during observation stops (every four hours).
- Animal enclosures must be cleaned and any bedding replaced as often as necessary to prevent soiling of the animals. If it becomes necessary to remove the animals from their enclosures in order to clean, safeguards must be in place to ensure animal safety and prevent escape.
- Animals should not be sedated unless recommended by a veterinarian. This is because sedation can make them more vulnerable to hypothermia, dehydration, and injury. If animals are sedated, veterinary guidance must be provided for their care.
- Use of environmental anxiolytics such as pheromones or calming music may be helpful to reduce stress during transportation.

Responsibilities at the destination

- Have an established community demand for the species and types of animals relocated.
- Destination communities should not engage in regular euthanasia of animals of the species being relocated due to lack of resources to provide sufficient care.
- Destination communities should have sufficient veterinary medical and behavioral healthcare resources to meet the needs of animals being relocated.
- Points of destination must have sufficient trained personnel ready to receive and evaluate animals upon arrival.
- Each animal should receive a documented physical examination at the time of arrival.
- Veterinary services should be available on arrival for any animal requiring care.
- The facility must have adequate housing prepared for the arriving animals.
- The need for isolation or quarantine of arriving animals should be determined based on legal requirements, their health status, source, and infectious disease risk, with due attention to incubation periods for pathogens of concern and detrimental effects of increasing length of stay.
- Destination organizations must have the ability to provide isolation, either within their facility or at off-site location(s), sufficient to prevent disease spread in the event that animals develop infectious disease.
- Destination organizations should be prepared to assume ownership and responsibility for transported animals at or prior to arrival. Unless there are extenuating circumstances

(e.g., a lost pet's original owner is identified), animals should not be returned to the source even in the event of unexpected medical or behavioral conditions.

- Destination organizations should disclose the state of origin of animals relocated by their organization.

Special precautions for young animals

- Extra care must be provided when transporting puppies and kittens including:
 - Prevent exposure to temperature extremes
 - Maintain adequate hydration and nutrition
 - Protect from infectious disease exposure
 - Unless orphaned, kittens or puppies younger than 8 weeks old should be transported with their mother in a space large enough for her to lie down on her side with legs extended for comfort and to facilitate nursing.

Note: Transporting animals younger than 8 weeks old across state lines is prohibited by some state laws. Commercial air transport of animals under 8 weeks of age is generally prohibited regardless of the final destination.

Special precautions for brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds of dogs

- U.S. Department of Transportation statistics show short-nosed breeds of dogs are more likely to die during air transport than dogs with normal-length muzzles, and similar risks are likely during road transportation. This is thought to be related to respiratory problems that are exacerbated by stress and difficulty with thermoregulation, so caution should be exercised when transporting these animals during warm weather. More details can be found by reviewing the AVMA's FAQ for air transport of brachycephalic dogs and cats.

Special considerations for cats

- Cats should be transported in a physically separate compartment from dogs that includes visual barriers and minimizes noise levels.
- Cats should be provided a place to hide during transport as this is an important coping mechanism during stressful situations.
- Cats must have access to a litterbox for transports longer than two hours in duration.
- Acclimating cats to their transport cage or carrier prior to travel may reduce the stress of the journey.

Special precautions for the transport of "special needs" dogs and cats

Relocation of animals that are compromised or debilitated should be avoided unless life-saving opportunities and resources can be provided at the destination. Animals in this category may include pregnant bitches and queens, senior pets, and animals recovering from surgery or illness.

- Ideally these animals would be transported only short distances if travelling by road.
- If travelling by air, these animals ideally would be transported by private airline or in the cabin of a commercial airline.
- If an animal has an infectious and easily transmissible disease, it should either not be transported until healthy or, if it must be transported, should travel alone and be isolated at the destination and steps taken to minimize the risk of disease transmission during transportation. In addition, the state veterinarian in the receiving state should be advised of the animal's condition and final destination, and his/her guidance sought.

DOCUMENTATION AND RELOCATION METRICS

There is no unified system in place to track the number of dogs and cats being relocated for adoption. Organizations engaging in relocation should track standard metrics for relocated animals by species and age. These should include:

- Annual numbers
- Incidence of behavioral and medical conditions
- Outcomes

Individual shelters employing common shelter software programs can readily track relocation metrics and, in some cases, can even transfer records electronically for relocated animals. This provides for more consistency of care.

Transporting adoptable pets from areas where shelters and rescue facilities are overcrowded to locations where new homes await can be rewarding and save lives. However, transporting these animals requires careful planning and execution.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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