

**RIVERSIDE COUNTY ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICES DEPARTMENT –
INDIO ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTER**

FINDINGS:

Finding Number 1:

During the period January through May 2004, Riverside County officials received approximately 100 citizens' complaints regarding the Indio Shelter concerning the treatment of animals and the negative attitude of employees toward the public and rescue organization representatives.

Response:

Respondent disagrees partially with the finding.

The Department received seventeen complaints from the public during this time. All were investigated and two were substantiated. The substantiated complaints concerned a dog in need of grooming and failing to notify adoptive families that their animals were provided with medication at the shelter. These two complaints were addressed per County policy. The department will investigate any additional complaints the Grand Jury can provide.

Finding Number 2:

Only 22 of the 2,720 animals impounded in FY 2002-2003 at the Indio Animal Control Shelter were transported to a veterinarian for treatment of their injuries or illness.

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

The Grand Jury report implies that not enough animals were taken to a veterinarian for needed treatment. The department transports all animals in need to a veterinarian for care and treatment. The Indio facility is an indoor/outdoor facility that constantly supplies fresh air. No air is recirculated, which minimizes the spread of disease. Officers for both the department and contracting agencies transport sick or injured animals picked up in the field to veterinarians prior to releasing them to Riverside County Animal Services. Because they have already been treated, there are relatively few sick animals in this shelter.

Finding Number 3:

The disposition of impounded animals from the Indio Animal Control Shelter representing seven (7) months in the FY 2003-2004 are reflected below:

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

The euthanasia statistics are correct. Euthanasia results from irresponsible pet owners who fail to spay/neuter their animals, who abuse their animals, who neglect their animals and/or who turn-in their no-longer-wanted animals at the shelter. The County is required by law to pick up animals running loose, and abused or neglected animals, and cannot turn away an animal that has been turned in regardless of its condition. Some animals must be put down due to serious injury or illness. Animals that are not highly adoptable must be put down after the legal time for holding has expired to make room for new animals that arrive.

Finding Number 4:

According to current policy dogs are held (5) days post-impound before the public or rescue organizations can adopt.

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

The dogs are held five days, not counting the day of impoundment. This gives the owners a chance to redeem their animals. This hold period complies with state law and county ordinance. The animals can be placed on hold for members of the public at any time during this process.

Finding Number 5:

Currently, the Indio Animal Control Shelter has working relationships with only the following three (3) rescue organizations and a private citizen:

- ***Save-a-Pet***
- ***Yucaipa Animal Placement Service***
- ***Orphan Pet Oasis***
- ***Private Citizen***

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

The Indio animal shelter has attempted to work with many other organizations but has found great difficulty finding groups that are willing to travel to Indio to pick up animals. The Indio facility has worked indirectly with numerous other groups to place animals by coordinating with the Riverside facility. We have had limited success. We believe that the new shelter will improve our efforts because the Chameleon computer system will allow us to share pictures of the animals with the Riverside shelter and breed-placement groups.

Finding Number 6:

Evidence shows that the Director of Riverside County Animal Control Services Department rarely visited the Indio Animal Control Shelter and was not well informed regarding the operations of the Indio Animal Shelter.

Response:

Respondent disagrees partially with the finding.

The former Director did not often visit the Indio Shelter. She was regularly provided with statistical reports on the shelter's performance.

The Director of Animal Services has resigned. The County is recruiting a new director.

Finding Number 7:

The management for the Animal Control Shelter in Indio failed to utilize an independent and unbiased citizen complaint process to address the public's issues and concerns.

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

Citizens complain directly to employees or their supervisors. If they do not feel the issue has been resolved, they complain up the chain of command and ultimately to the Board of Supervisors.

Finding Number 8:

During a visit at the Indio Animal Control Shelter, the Grand Jury observed the following conditions:

- a. Most of the 30 dog kennels were dirty with strong unpleasant odor of feces and/or vomit on the floor***

Response:

Respondent partially disagrees with the finding.

Kennels often are soiled with feces. Usually this occurs about thirty minutes after feeding times. The cleaning schedule takes this into account. Kennel attendants making their rounds between regular cleanings are instructed to clean up the vomit and feces whenever they observe it. Even when clean, the kennels are not appealing. The shelter is an old facility and will be replaced in spring 2005.

- b. Soft canned food for very young, elderly or sick animals was unavailable.***

Response:

The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.

Soft food is available at all times and is stored in the storage container at the back of the Indio facility. The department contracts with the local feed store and soft food can be picked up at anytime (if supplies become exhausted) to assure all animals receive the proper care. Soft food is provided to animals in need (e.g., those without teeth, puppies, kittens and others) on the advice of a veterinarian.

- c. Towels, blanket or paper to create a more comfortable environment for puppies, kittens, and older or sick animals was unavailable.***

Response:

The respondent partially disagrees with the finding.

Towels and blankets are available at the Indio facility but are only used when animals' fur is not adequate to protect them. The Indio facility was not designed to accommodate a washer and dryer; therefore, these supplies must be rationed and treated as disposable.

- d. Upper fencing on some kennels that would prevent larger dogs from jumping into another kennel was missing.**

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

Kennels are used to house animals that do not show signs of jumping in these cages. A work order has been submitted to make the necessary repairs.

- e. Drain holes (6-8" in diameter) in the kennel floors were uncovered.**

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

New drain covers were custom made by Facilities Management to accommodate the drain holes and have been installed.

- f. Freezer containing euthanized animals was unlocked and accessible to anyone on the property.**

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

The freezer remains unlocked at the recommendation of the former Riverside County Veterinarian. The freezer remains unlocked to allow other agencies access when they need to dispose of carcasses. There is a release mechanism to open the door from the interior. This issue will be submitted to Risk Management for a recommendation.

- g. An outdoor run for overflow had no protective covering to reduce exposure from the sun**

Response:

Respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.

An awning was installed in 2001 and equipped with misters to reduce exposure from the sun.

- h. The condition of the building showed a need for repairs and has not been repainted since 1974.**

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

The paint on the building is lead-based and requires a substantial amount of money to remove. Riverside County Animal Services is scheduled to enter a new shelter in spring 2005, so a large capital investment in the old shelter is not a prudent use of tax money. Inexpensive repairs and maintenance items have been requested. Work orders have been submitted to repair an exterior light, to repair chain link kennel fencing, to repair guillotine doors and to repair latches on kennels.

- i. Cooling misters that surround the outside animal quarantine area were inoperative.***

Response:

Respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.

The misters are operational. The Indio facility has extremely hard water, which requires constant cleaning and replacement of clogged nozzles. The Supervising Animal Control Officer personally performs the maintenance. The Grand Jury may have seen the misters when they were off temporarily for maintenance.

- j. Administrative and animal records were observed to be scattered on the floor and spilling out of file boxes in a metal shed that also contained bags of dog and cat food.***

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

These records have now been properly secured in a closet.

- k. Two (2) of the animal control vehicles do not have the circulating roof swamp coolers on them.***

Response:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

All animal control units have been equipped with new air-conditioners.

- l. Upon reviewing the Riverside County Policy and Procedure Manual there are no procedures for implementation of spay/neuter programs.***

Response:

The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.

It is departmental policy that all adopted animals must be spayed or neutered. The recent Humane Society of the United States audit recently commended Riverside County for our pro-active program.

Finding Number 9

Prior to the euthanasia of animals, the Indio Kennel Attendants do not obtain the name and phone number of private citizens and rescue organizations who have placed a "Hold" on an animal for adoption and therefore, are not in compliance with the Indio Animal Shelter's Policy Number 326. This policy states, "If there are any holds on an animal (even if they are expired), an attempt will be made, via phone to the person or persons to confirm they are not interested in the animal."

The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.

The staff in Indio denies violating policy 326. Management staff would like any documented information regarding this allegation from the Grand Jury so an investigation can be completed.

Finding Number 10:

Many animals impounded at the Indio Animal Shelter are not receiving needed veterinary care. This practice is in violation of California Civil Code Section 1834.4(a) and (b) which states, "impounded animals must receive appropriate veterinary care" and also violates Section 559d (a) and (b) of the California Penal Code, which require that "no adoptable or treatable animal be killed."

Response:

The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.

Of the 17 complaints received during this period, two alleged a lack of veterinary care. One involved a male Chihuahua and the other a female Chihuahua. The allegations were investigated. Written documentation from a veterinarian and Animal Samaritans indicate the animals were cared for properly by the department. If the grand jury has new information, the department will investigate.

Finding Number 11:

In accordance with Riverside County Animal Service Policy number 335, all animals deemed suitable for adoption are administered Bordatella vaccination as well as the 5 in 1 injection. Although this information is recorded on the Animal Cage Card, the rescue organization's representatives and private citizens are not notified of the vaccinations when adopting the animals.

Response:

The respondent agrees with the finding.

The Grand Jury report brought this to the attention of management and it has been corrected. All information is now recorded on paperwork and follows the animal to its final destination.

Finding Number 12:

The Supervising Animal Control Officer at the Indio Animal Shelter was unable to provide documentation or clearly articulate the qualifications, behavioral standards, problem solving skills and human relations skills for the Animal Control Officers Position.

Response:

The respondent partially disagrees with the finding.

The Supervising Animal Control Officer in Indio might not have been able to provide the information to the Grand Jury members when they were on site. However, this is public information and is readily available on the County web site.

Finding Number 13:

In April 2003, a person present at the Indio Animal Shelter documented the following acts of cruelty to animals:

- a. ***"Kennel attendants kicking and punching dogs like they were punching bags that were in the process of being euthanized."***
- b. ***Newborn kittens (a week old) were not fed and were allowed to starve to death.***

- c. *Kennel attendants using their animal control sticks to drag cats to the edge of the cage for the purpose of euthanasia.*
- d. *Kennel attendants hitting cats with their animal control stick to calm them prior to moving to another cage or euthanasia.*

Response:

The respondent agrees with the finding.

There is a person who alleged acts of cruelty to animals in April 2003. The employees deny the allegation. The person making those allegations was a sheriff's labor trustee in a work-release program ordered by Riverside County Superior Court. The accusations surfaced more than a year after the alleged incident and could not be substantiated during an internal investigation. The management takes all accusations of animal cruelty seriously and requested an independent third party investigation. The investigation should be completed next month.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation Number 1:

Riverside County Animal Control Department develop and revise kennel operating procedures that specifically apply to the Indio Shelter addressing the following areas:

- a. *Field Service responsibilities and practices.*
- b. *Administrative and Office Record System.*
- c. *Vehicle maintenance and operation.*
- d. *Care of injured and/or sick animals.*
- e. *Euthanasia.*

Response:

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

Policies and procedures are being reviewed by the Department of Animal Services (DAS) Process Improvement Team, CVAG and Animal Samaritans and are being revised and implemented as needed. The project's completion date is scheduled to correspond with the opening of the Coachella Valley Animal Campus.

Recommendation Number 2:

The Indio Animal Control Management install shelves in the metal shed to store administrative records that are currently on the floor in the metal storage shed and in a bathroom.

Response:

The recommendation has been implemented.

These records are now properly secured in a closet. The records will be moved again when the Coachella Valley site opens.

Recommendation Number 3:

Management at the Indio Animal Shelter provide soft foods for young, elderly and/or sick animals and store all animal food properly in the food storage locker.

The recommendation has been implemented.

Soft food is available at all times and is stored in the storage container located at the back of the Indio facility. There is also a contract with a local feed store if supplies run low.

Recommendation Number 4:

Indio Animal Control Services Supervisor establish an effective work schedule that focuses on managing the operations at the Indio facility.

Response:

The recommendation has been implemented.

This is already in place as every staff member is and has been on a working schedule.

Recommendation Number 5:

Replace all missing drain covers to prevent injury to small dogs.

Response:

The recommendation has been implemented.

These covers have already been repaired and replaced.

Recommendation Number 6:

Formal disciplinary action be taken against employees who fail to take injured, sick or suffering animals to the veterinarian or abuse or neglect impounded animals.

Response:

The recommendation has been implemented.

Animal Control employees have been instructed to seek veterinarian care for all sick animals. It is County Policy that people who abuse animals will be disciplined.

Recommendation Number 7:

Indio Animal Control Services Supervisor and staff attend appropriate training classes that emphasize public relations and effective community-relations with rescue organizations.

Response:

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Department of Animal Services (DAS) is working with the Community Health Agency (CHA) to design a training program specifically geared toward DAS operations. All DAS staff will be required to attend. This should be completed by January 2005.

Recommendation Number 8:

Create a schedule of operating hours (staying within budget) at the Indio Animal Shelter to accommodate the working public for increased access to reclaim lost pets and promote adoptions.

Response:

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

We have budgeted for additional staff to increase hours. It is anticipated to have staff hired and trained by spring of 2005.

Recommendation Number 9:

Develop an effective program to increase pet adoptions, returning lost pets back to their owners, reduce euthanasia by:

- ◆ ***Implementation of an aggressive spay/neuter program.***
- ◆ ***Distribute educational materials to the public regarding pet adoption and the need for spay/neuter.***
- ◆ ***Aggressive networking with rescues organizations that could incorporate offsite adoptions.***
- ◆ ***Maintain and update "website" to promote adoptions.***

Response:

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The department is developing plans for such programs, given the currently allocated resources. Public forums have been held to solicit input from the community regarding expected outcomes and suggested methods of meeting those outcomes. Attendees were asked to provide contact information if they could serve on focus groups to prioritize and recommend implementation plans for the suggested program components. The department hopes to begin implementing the first programs by spring 2005. We anticipate implementing additional programs after proposed programs are up and running. All programs will be monitored for effectiveness and modified or replaced if they do not meet expectations.

Programs that will require additional County resources must be approved through the County budget process.

Recommendation Number 10:

Indio Animal Control Shelter establish contracts and expand working relationships with rescue organizations to increase the number of pet adoptions.

Response:

The recommendation has been implemented.

We are reviewing existing contracts and MOU's with rescue groups to define the scope of each group and DAS's responsibility. It is our intent to meet quarterly with rescue groups to discuss issues and improve communication.

Recommendation Number 11:

The Director of Animal Control provide a staff member, with experience in public relations, to serve as the Indio Animal Service Liaison to establish coordination with rescue organizations and pet adoptions.

Response:

The recommendation requires further analysis.

This recommendation aligns with the department's strategic direction. We believe this will be supported by the Coachella Valley Animal Campus Commission. But, the department cannot commit to this without the commission's approval and financial support.

Finding Number 12:

In FY 2004-2005 the Indio Animal Shelter establish and promote a pet adoption program with the goal to reduce by at least twenty-five percent (25%) the number of animals euthanized.

Response:

The recommendation requires further analysis.

See response to recommendation #9, above.

This is an admirable goal. Participants in the community forum have expressed a loftier goal – no adoptable animals euthanized by 2014. It is clear that an adoption program alone cannot substantially reduce euthanasia rates. Also required is a spay and neuter program and an educational/social marketing program. Pet owners must take responsibility for their companion animals in order to reduce pet over population and euthanasia.

Recommendation Number 13:

Revise the current complaint process through implementing a three-part (3) Citizen's Animal Service Complaint form with a tracking number and copies furnished to:

1. *Complainant*
2. *Director of Animal Control Services*
3. *Director of Community Health Agency*

Response:

This recommendation will not be implemented.

The county already has a complaint process. Citizens can inform the Animal Services Director and/or the Agency Director if they do not believe their complaints were handled appropriately at a lower level.

Recommendation Number 14:

The Director of Community Health Agency submit a quarterly report to the Board of Supervisors, which includes a copy of the complaint and corrective action taken.

This recommendation will not be implemented.

See response to recommendation #13, above.