

Saving lives, saving money, and meeting public expectations for humane animal services



PROTECTING COMMUNITY CATS



INCLUDING
MODEL COMMUNITY
CAT STERILIZATION
LEGISLATION



A Publication of the No Kill Advocacy Center

COMMUNITY CAT



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PROGRAMS

FOR MOST of the history of animal sheltering in the United States, community cats who ended up in “shelters” faced an almost certain death sentence. Without a human address, there was no one to reclaim these animals. Fearful of humans, they were not considered candidates for traditional adoption and were not afforded the opportunity. Combined with the misconception that they disproportionately suffer without human caretakers, the tragic result was the execution of virtually all healthy and self-sufficient community cats in pounds across the nation. Such killing was the *status quo* until cat lovers began advocating for the alternative of sterilization.

In a community cat sterilization program—an essential component of the No Kill Equation—cats who are not social with humans and end up in the shelter are released back to their habitats. The shelter also works with local caregivers who trap the cats for purposes of sterilization and release.* Sometimes, these cats have human caretakers who watch over them and feed them. But often, the cats who end up in shelters are like other “wild” animals, thoroughly unsocialized to humans, surviving on their own through instinct and wit, and no worse off because of it.

Today, many No Kill advocates are also promoting sterilization (what is sometimes called “return to field” or what animal control personnel refer to as “shelter in place”) for *all* community cats, including those who are social with people. For those shelters which have yet to comprehensively implement the programs and services of the No Kill Equation and to provide a safe, temporary waystation where members of the public can go to reclaim their lost animals, the reason to do so can be compelling. Where the alternative to return to field (RTF) is death, RTF is, without question, always the preferred outcome. Moreover, RTF is a “quick fix”: it is less expensive than impound and killing and allows shelters to dramatically and immediately increase live release rates without the need for additional staff, resources, or infrastructure.

There are other, equally compelling, reasons. Many “lost” cats taken to shelters are not in fact lost, but were merely outside and therefore perceived to be homeless. These animals therefore become “lost” to their families when they are impounded. Returning such cats to the location where they were found merely returns them home. Moreover, even if they were lost when they were picked up, the likelihood of being reunited with their families is greater for cats if they are allowed to remain where they are rather than being admitted to the shelter. In fact, cats are 13 times more likely to be returned home by non-shelter means (such as returning home on their own) than by a call or visit to a shelter. And people are up to three times more likely to adopt cats as neighborhood strays versus adopting from a shelter.

At the same time, the traditional sheltering dogma that cats should live exclusively indoors or risk great harm has been proven false, with outdoor cats living roughly the same lifespan as indoor pet cats. In other words, the risk of death is lower and the chance of adoption higher for cats on the streets than cats in the shelter. In a study of over 100,000 alley cats, less than one percent of those cats were suffering from debilitating conditions. As such, RTF meets the two goals of a shelter better than impoundment in a shelter does: reclaim by families or adoption into a new home.

But admittedly, there are open-admission No

Kill shelters that limit RTF to cats who are not social with people. When community cats who are social with people end up at the shelter and are not reclaimed, they are adopted into new homes. Moreover, if the cats are truly lost or abandoned, shelters should not forget that they have a mandate to help reunite families. Since the choice presented—RTF or death—is a false one, breaking up families by simply releasing animals back on the streets without trying to find their existing home is at odds with that mission. This view loses sight of what, in fact, is one of the primary functions and mandates of a municipal animal shelter: to provide

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a safe haven for the lost animals of local people and a place where they can go to find them. And if the family does not show up, if cats are truly without a human home and they are social with people, they should be given one. In fact, the shelter is obligated to find them a loving, new one. That’s the job they are paid by taxpayers to do.

Finally, the reason cats are more likely to find their original home or a new one from the streets is because most shelters are run ineffectively and inefficiently, not because people aren’t looking for

their cats or homes are not available. Those shelters that do a good job at both have been able to increase—by 20-fold and more—the percentage of cats reclaimed by their families, at the same time that they maintain adoption rates that allow them to achieve live-release rates as high as 99% of all cats entering the shelter. If shelters did a better job at being shelters, not only would they have realized their mission, but RTF would not be the difference between life and death for cats it is today.

As such, if shelters are going to embrace RTF, rather than guaranteed adoption, shelters are obligated to check for identification, scan for microchips, review lost cat reports, knock on doors in the neighborhood, and post the cat's photograph online. Moreover, cats who are unable to care for themselves on their own—such as geriatric cats with health conditions regarding ongoing maintenance

and really young kittens—should not be RTF candidates. Instead, they should be guaranteed adoption.

In short, when the choice comes down to RTF or death, RTF should be embraced time and time again. But those are not—or at least, *do not have to be*—the only two choices. If a shelter is meeting its obligations, RTF wouldn't be the first choice for community cats who are social with humans: redemption and adoption would be. It would and should, however, remain the last, because killing should never be a choice at all.

** While it is popular to use the term “return” instead of “release,” it is inaccurate unless considered expansively to include all of the outdoors. If it is not safe to return the cats to the location where they were trapped or picked up, they should be released in another location.*

THE BENEFITS

of Community Cat Sterilization



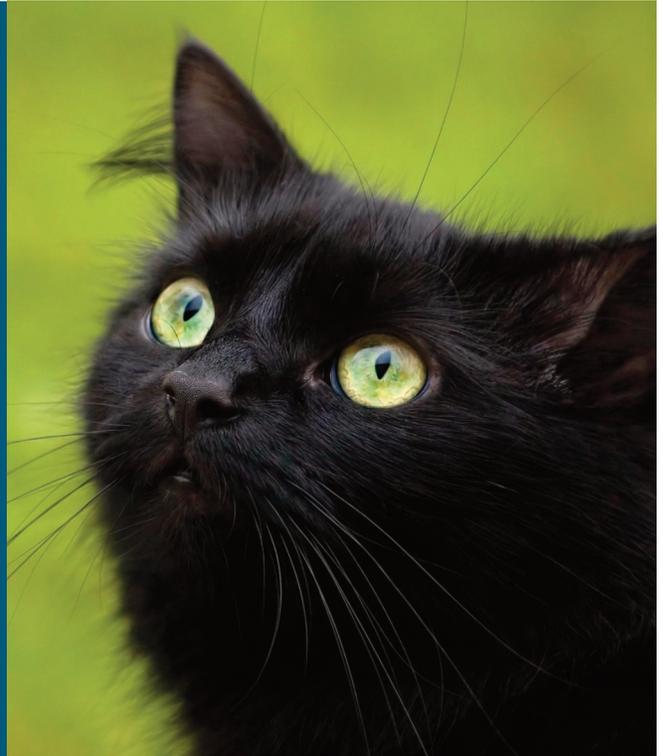
✔ **REDUCE INTAKES AND KILLING OF COMMUNITY CATS:** A targeted community cat program in the zip code with the highest intake rates in a Florida jurisdiction led to a 66% decrease in shelter cat impoundment over two years (compared to a 12% decline in the non-target zip codes). At the end of the study period, the target areas had a 3.5-fold lower intake rate and 17.5-fold lower kill rate.

A similar program in California reduced cat intake by 29% despite only sterilizing a modest number of cats relative to the size of the population. Killing declined by 67%.

✔ **REDUCE FREE ROAMING CATS AND CITIZEN COMPLAINTS:** A California community which implemented a community cat program saw the number of cats “Dead on Arrival” decline by 20%, both because there were fewer cats and sterilized cats roamed less.

In Delaware, the number of complaint calls to

A California community which implemented a community cat program saw the number of cats “Dead on Arrival” decrease by 20%. In Delaware, the implementation of a community cat program resulted in a 98% decline in complaint calls.



animal services declined 98% following the implementation of a community cat program. Similarly, a Montana community saw a decline of 84%. Community cat-related complaint calls to a Texas animal control shelter likewise declined 90% following the implementation of a community cat program. Driving these declines were reduced concerns about their welfare, fewer kittens who are perceived as vulnerable by concerned citizens, and even reduced intolerance as a result of mating and fighting behaviors which are resolved by sterilization.

✔ **REDUCE ILLNESS IN THE SHELTER:** Used to living outdoors, community cats are stressed in a shelter and a stressed cat is more likely to get sick. Thanks to fewer cat intakes, URI in a California shelter declined by 99%, reducing killing and length of stay thus resulting in a healthier cat population, more revenue (from adoptions), and lower costs (treatment, holding, and tragically killing).

✔ **SAVE TAXPAYER MONEY AND INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND LIFESAVING:** Sterilizing rather than killing community cats is simply less expensive, with exponential savings in terms of reducing births. A study in California found that a community which sterilized roughly 2,500 cats every year saw 3,000 fewer cats entering the shelter. Assuming an average cost of \$106 to impound, hold, and kill a cat, compared to \$72 per cat to participate in the community cat program, the savings was significant.

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Moreover, “The impact of not having to care for more than 3,000 additional cats annually allows staff and management to focus on other areas of the operation and pursue other welfare

related strategies. The internal capacity of the organization to help other animals is increased without requiring more staff.”

How a Community Cat Program Reduces Intake and Killing



✔ Community cats who are not social with humans do not enter the shelter where they are all killed after being classified as “unadoptable.” For community cats who are not social with humans, a community cat sterilization program is the functional equivalent of adoption.

- ✔ Decrease in the number of kittens being born.
- ✔ Decrease in complaint calls associated with community cats. According to one study, “Many residents indicated that they enjoyed the cats, but they felt overrun with kittens, frustrated by noisy cat breeding behavior or concerned about aggression toward their own cats, problems that are resolved by sterilization.”
- ✔ Community cat programs help create a vibrant rescue network that adopts out community cats who are social with people through rescue groups, rather than having them impounded (and potentially killed) by shelters.
- ✔ Community cat programs also result in a decline in dog impounds and killing. How? What animal control officers (ACOs) do on the street and how they respond to calls and interact with the public can have a major impact on preventing intakes and helping to keep animals with their responsible caretakers. When ACOs provide the community with an alternative to impoundment and killing, those who might be inclined to defer to them as the “experts” on what is best for animals emulate their newer, more enlightened view. Instead of continuing the practice of “responding to calls with offers of immediate impound” as one study noted, ACOs connected “residents with community resources to keep animals in place.” In other words, since officers were trained away from rounding up and killing cats, they began problem solving and educating the public on dogs, too.

Community cat programs are popular with voters. More than 80% of Americans believe it is more humane to leave a cat outside than to have her caught and killed.



SEC. 1. POLICY

The County Commission/City Council finds and declares that a community cat program is an effective method to both care for and meet the public's desire to see community cats cared for in a humane manner. It improves neighborhood tranquility and public health, while at the same time reducing the number of community cats, 'nuisance' complaints, impound and killing, and wasteful expenditures. <<NAME OF ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTER>> shall employ a community cat program to reduce the number of cats killed.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS

(a) *Cat*. —The term 'cat' means a member of the species *Felis catus*.

(b) *Community cat*.—The term 'community cats' means a free-roaming cat.

(c) *Ear-tipping*.—The term 'ear-tipping' means the removal of the ¼ inch tip of a community cat's left ear, performed while the cat is under anesthesia in compliance with any applicable federal or state law and under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian.

(d) *Community cat caretaker*.—The term ‘community cat caretaker’ means a person who provides care to one or more community cats. However, community cat caregivers are not the owner, harbinger, controller, or keeper of a community cat.

(e) *Community cat program*.—The term ‘community cat program’ means the nonlethal process of humanely trapping, sterilizing, vaccinating for rabies, ear-tipping, and releasing community cats to their habitats.

SEC. 3.

(a) A community cat shall go through the community cat program instead of euthanasia unless reclaimed, transferred to a rescue group, or adopted, with the following exception:

(1) Further veterinary care is required, in which case the cat will be returned once it no longer needs care.

(b) A trapped, ear-tipped community cat shall be released on site unless further veterinary care is required, in which case the cat will be returned once the animal no longer needs care.

(c) An ear-tipped community cat received by <<NAME OF ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTER>> shall be returned to the location where trapped after sterilization unless further veterinary care is required or a home is found for the cat.

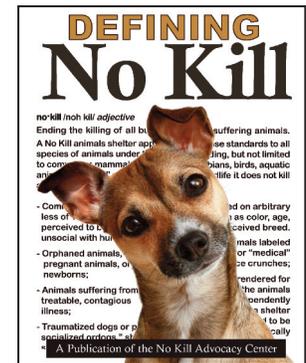
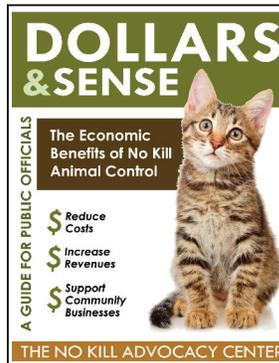
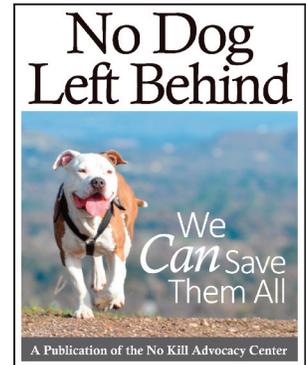
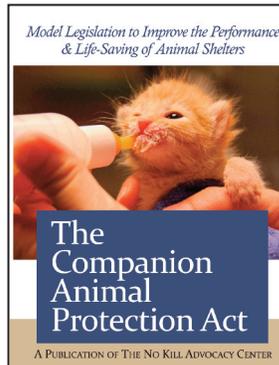
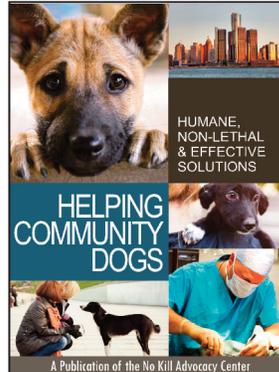
(d) A community cat caretaker may reclaim a community cat if impounded at <<NAME OF ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTER>> without fee if sterilized or for purposes of placing the cat in a community cat program.

(e) Trapping of a community cat is only permitted for purposes of a community cat program, providing needed veterinary care, adoption, transfer to a rescue group, or reunification with his/her owner.

(f) Leash laws, stray laws, licensing laws, and limitations on the number of cats owned, kept, held, or harbored shall not apply to community cat caretakers.

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A No Kill nation
is within our reach.