



## ***North Valley Animal Disaster Group Standard Operating Guidelines***

Title: EUTHANASIA

Objective: Provide information on safe and ethical euthanasia

Description:

Euthanasia will only be carried out by a Veterinarian, RVT, or Animal Control Officer with the direct approval of Butte County Animal Control.

Euthanasia is sometimes a medical necessity when working with animals-it may be the only thing we can do to relieve an animals suffering.

The American Veterinary Medical Association has written guidelines on acceptable methods of humane euthanasia that cover a variety of topics related to the act of euthanasia. This document here incorporates the relevant concepts as related to animals in disaster situations.

Humane killing should only be carried out after giving due consideration to the following factors (in order of priority):

1. Human safety - Remember that your safety and the safety of co-workers and volunteers is the first priority.
2. Animal welfare – Factors that need to be considered include the animal species and age grouping, the severity of the injury (i.e. is immediate euthanasia required or can treatment result in reasonable chance of improved quality of life) and the overall stress level of the animal (i.e. can the animal be safely handled and transported). Proper handling is vital to minimize pain and distress in animals, to ensure the safety of the person performing euthanasia, and, often, to protect other people and animals. Handling animals that are not accustomed to humans or that are severely injured or otherwise compromised may not be possible without inducing stress, so some latitude in the means of euthanasia is needed in some situations.
3. Practicality - Practicality of the method in regards to the nature of the animal and the situation, and presence of appropriately experienced personnel (i.e. can the animal be safely handled and chosen methods safely administered), available transportation and time (i.e. distance to a veterinary clinic or other facility and is appropriate transportation

4. equipment on hand) and location (e.g. proximity to people and infrastructure in relation to firearm safety).
5. Skill – chemical euthanasia requires medical training and can only be done by licensed veterinarian, trained licensed veterinary technician, or a trained animal control officer. Gunshot should only be performed by highly skilled personnel trained in the use of firearms (e.g. animal control and law enforcement officers, properly trained veterinarians) and only in jurisdictions that allow for legal firearm use. Use of gunshot may be appropriate and acceptable in remote areas or emergency situations in which withholding death by gunshot will result in prolonged, unrelieved pain and suffering of the animal or imminent danger to human life. Protocols for ensuring a humane death by gunshot have been described.
6. Aesthetics – the general public may react strongly to the method of euthanasia due to a heightened emotional state in disasters and lack of understanding of a particular technique. The technique used should be as reliable, simple, safe and effective as possible, should only be performed by competent personnel, and should not cause undue stress to human observers. Wherever possible, it should be conducted away from members of the public, but in doing so, should not add additional stress to the animal.

### **Euthanasia of Animals in the Temporary Shelter**

If, in the judgment of an animal control officer or licensed veterinarian, an animal is experiencing extreme pain or suffering or is injured beyond likely recovery or has a potentially fatal infectious disease that would endanger human or animal life, the officer or veterinarian may lawfully euthanize such animal.

It is recommended that euthanasia be performed in an area separate from the general shelter population, such that no members of the public or other animals will witness the euthanasia not because there is something to hide, but to reduce the emotional stress euthanasia can produce in both humans and other animals. Euthanasia must be carried out by a licensed veterinarian, trained licensed veterinary technician, trained animal control officer or law enforcement officer. If a veterinarian is not available at the temporary shelter the animal may be transported to a veterinary facility to provide the euthanasia.

### **Field Euthanasia:**

Several states have enacted laws on "emergency" euthanasia. In those states, law enforcement officers, animal control agents, veterinarians, or other designated persons may shoot or otherwise euthanize an animal in an emergency if deemed to be dangerous, injured, or sick beyond treatment. In most states, that determination must be made not only by the person performing the euthanasia, but also by one or more witnesses. Additionally, in those cases the owner generally must be considered as "unavailable" before the animal can be euthanized. In many disaster situations, an animal may not have an identified owner. All methods of identifying an owner should be used and noted on the animal's documentation

*If an animal is in pain or suffering but not at the point of death:*

1. Consult with a veterinarian immediately to determine if palliative measures can be taken while attempts are made to contact the owner.
2. Attempt to contact the owner. If it was determined by the veterinarian that the animal should be humanely euthanized immediately (prior to contact), the veterinarian or law enforcement officer should make the contact.
3. Follow veterinary recommendations regarding treatment or euthanasia and record all observations, discussions and treatments in the animal's documentation.

*If the animal is at the point of death:*

1. Make every attempt to contact the owner. A veterinarian or law enforcement office should make the contact if possible to help explain the necessity of euthanasia
2. Humanely euthanize the animal
3. Record all observations of the condition of the animal in the animal's documentation
4. Document the animal's condition with photographs if possible

Disposal of Carcass- refer to NVADG guidelines for handling of the deceased animal and carcass disposal.

Only volunteers that are emotionally prepared for a euthanasia procedure should provide assistance if needed. The death of the animals we are trying to help can be very difficult to deal with. If you feel the need to remove yourself from the situation, please tell a supervisor immediately. Do not wait until you are overwhelmed. We all understand, and we need to maintain emotional health in order to help more animals.

Adapted from:

AVMA Euthanasia Guidelines 2013 edition

NASAAEP Disaster Veterinary Care: Best Practices

AVMA Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals: 2019 edition

Longair JA, Finley GG, Laniel MA, et al. Guidelines for the euthanasia of domestic animals by firearms. *Can Vet J* 1991;32:724– 726.

Hanyok PM. Guidelines for police officers when responding to emergency animal incidents. *Anim Welf Inf Center Bull* winter 2001–spring 2002;11(3–4).

Related Documents Attached: n/a

Date: January 9, 2020

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