



Contact: press@aspca.org
(212) 876-7700 x 4655

A GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY-USED TERMS IN ANIMAL WELFARE

Adoptable: Animals who have good physical and behavioral well-being and are ready to be adopted without threat to the health and/or safety of other animals or people in the home or community.

Adoption guarantee: A pledge to the community by an organization or collaboration to find a home for every adoptable animal in its care regardless of the time or financial resources required.

Animal Control (also called Animal Services or Animal Care and Control): Publicly funded government agencies charged with protecting public health and safety through a variety of animal-oriented services such as housing stray and unwanted animals, trapping stray animals in the community, responding to “nuisance animal” and “dangerous animal” complaints, enforcing local and state laws regarding the keeping of domestic animals, issuing animal licenses, etc.

Animal overpopulation: In the United States, an estimated four to five million cats and dogs are euthanized in private and public shelters annually—many of these animals would be adoptable if the facilities had unlimited space and resources to promote the animals for adoption.

Animal protection, Animal welfare: While these terms may be used somewhat interchangeably, “animal welfare” is an older term that generally refers to efforts that see to the care and well-being (humane treatment) of animals.

“Animal protection” is the term more commonly used today, and is generally understood to encompass animal welfare activities *and* public advocacy, law enforcement, legal and legislative efforts to protect the health and safety of animals. The term “animal protection” was developed to offset negative public reaction to the use of the term “animal rights.”

Animal rights: “Animal rights” refers to a philosophical and political position that animals are entitled to rights regarding their status and treatment without reference to human benefit or value.

“Animal rights” activities seek to end the pain and suffering of animals not by improving their current conditions of treatment but rather by the elimination of any human exploitation of animals—even when that exploitation is currently allowed by law or a commonly accepted practice. Examples would include raising and killing of animals for [human] consumption and the use of animals as laboratory subjects.

Asilomar Accords: A format for collecting and reporting shelter data in order to advance understanding (within and outside of the animal protection industry) of the animal overpopulation problem and to identify strategies and assess progress toward reducing the euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals.

The Asilomar Accords data-collection and reporting guidelines were developed in August 2004 by 20 animal protection industry leaders who met at Asilomar in Pacific Grove, Calif., for the purpose of building bridges across varying philosophies, developing relationships and creating goals focused on

significantly reducing the euthanasia of healthy and treatable companion animals in the United States. For more information, visit: www.asilomaraccords.org.

Euthanasia (necessary v. unnecessary euthanasia): Literally translated from the Greek root word to mean “good death,” “euthanasia” in the “animal protection” context generally refers to the practice of providing a humane, pain-free death for animals when either:

- a) The animals are deemed not adoptable for reasons of health, behavior or temperament problems; and/or
- b) The agency must make space for more incoming animals and animal admissions exceed discharges in the form of adoptions, returns-to-owners and/or transfers to foster care or other agencies.

The ASPCA believes that a private humane organization should not admit more animals than it has the resources to save, and that euthanasia of “surplus” animals—if necessary in a given community—should be the responsibility of the local government agency.

Feral: Domestic species that have reverted to a free-living state are called “feral.” Feral cats are typically the descendants of cats who have been abandoned or strayed from their homes. (Wild cats are not feral as their ancestors were never domesticated.) Adult feral cats are difficult to socialize to humans. Feral kittens, however, can be socialized to live with humans if they are taken from a feral colony before they are about twelve weeks old and provided with substantial, structured positive exposure to people.

Humane communities: The ASPCA’s vision is for the United States to be a nation of humane communities in which all animals are treated with kindness and respect. Examples of programs and infrastructure that lead to humane communities include:

- A community-wide save rate at or above 75% for animals entering shelters;
- A high rate of spay/neuter among the owned animal population;
- Strong anti-cruelty statutes and effective enforcement;
- Adequate pet-friendly housing;
- Humane education as an integral part of school and community program curriculums;
- Adequate and accessible veterinary services;
- Adequate and accessible pet behavior and training services;
- Practical and proactive inclusion of pets in parks and public spaces;
- Proactive pet policies by housing/neighborhood associations;
- Adequate “TNR” to humanely care for the community’s feral cats; and
- Other creative programming to engage the community in caring for and benefiting from companion animals.

Low-kill: A term used by some agencies to refer to a change in policies that will lead to a significant reduction in euthanasia of adoptable animals while not completely closing admissions or eliminating the euthanasia of adoptable animals; generally seen as a policy-position between “open admission” and “no kill.”

Mobile adoptions: The practice of increasing adoptions by bringing adoptable shelter animals directly to the public either through mobile adoption vans and/or by collaborating with local retailers to create adoption space within their stores.

No-kill: A community partnership among public and private animal protection organizations aimed at eliminating the euthanasia of the community’s “surplus” companion animals (i.e. those animals “turned in” to animal shelters) except in instances of severe health, behavior or temperament issues.

While some individual organizations refer to their own philosophy or policies as “no-kill,” the term is most accurately used to describe a community-wide collaborative effort. The original no-kill collaboration launched in San Francisco in 1994 when an historic partnership between the private San Francisco SPCA and the public San Francisco Animal Care & Control led to sharing resources and collaborating on strategies and programs to end the euthanasia of healthy, adoptable animals in the city.

Open door v. limited intake (or open admission v. limited admission): Refers to the philosophy and admissions policy of a non-profit animal sheltering organization.

“Open door” or “open admission” shelters accept surrendered animals (and in some cases stray animals) from their geographic service area on an unlimited basis. Typically these facilities euthanize animals in order to make space for incoming animals. In most cases, publicly funded Animal Control agencies are open admission shelters.

“Limited intake” or “limited admission” shelters accept animals only as space becomes available. These facilities may also limit intake by requiring appointments for incoming animals, by instituting additional criteria—such as adoptability of the animals, and/or by only accepting animals from certain sources—for example, only from the local government animal control agency.

“Pound:” an outdated term, previously used to refer to Animal Control shelters where strays and unwanted animals are housed.

Rescue: Nonprofit groups providing foster care and adoption for a specific category of companion animals in need of re-homing. Some rescues focus their efforts on a specific breed of dog or cat, some focus on species, such as rabbits or hamsters, while others focus on a geographic area, etc.

Save rate: The percent of adoptable animals that leave shelter facilities alive through adoption, return-to-owner, or transfer to another non-profit agency such as a breed rescue group, foster care organization or another shelter with greater capacity. For a community that has set a goal of no-kill, the save rate is calculated based on all of the animals entering the system and not just the number of animals entering one facility.

Stray intake: Owned animals admitted to an animal control or private animal shelter because they are lost or are picked up while running at-large. Some published research suggests that approximately one-half of animals in shelters nationwide enter those shelters as strays.

Surrender intake: Animals admitted to an Animal Control or private animal shelter because the owners no longer want them or can no longer care for them. Some research suggests that approximately one-half of animals in shelters nationwide enter those shelters as surrenders.

“TNR:” “Trap-Neuter-Return” is a humane, non-lethal approach to feral cat population control, where healthy feral cats are humanely trapped, sterilized and vaccinated, then returned to their habitat and provided with long-term care, including food and shelter.