



ANIMAL CALLS FOR SERVICE: ESSENTIAL POLICY GUIDANCE TO KEEP OFFICERS AND THE COMMUNITY SAFE

This bulletin emphasizes the importance of establishing clear guidance for officers responding to domestic animal and wildlife incidents. Animal incidents have often been considered an ancillary duty imposed upon law enforcement, especially when the local community contracts with a professional service provider to assist in handling recovered stray or lost pets. However, ample research has concluded that often, there is a nexus between animal cruelty and violence towards humans.¹ For example, in one study, 75% of abused women who had pets reported a history of the animal being threatened or intentionally harmed by their abuser over 90% of the time.² Furthermore, a separate study concluded that there is an increased risk of a victim suffering severe or even fatal injuries when the suspect has a history of abusing animals.³ Understanding the connection between animal abuse and violence is essential to effective crime fighting, and missing the opportunity to recognize enhanced risks of violence presents an increased risk to officers who are called upon to respond to these violent incidents.

Providing strong policy guidance concerning animal encounters and training for officers to understand any link between animal abuse and other forms of violence is essential to protecting officers today. Furthermore, officers are often called upon to handle aggressive animals or animals that appear aggressive, and it's vital that officers are provided training to handle such situations effectively. How an officer handles an animal encounter can build trust with the community or damage such relationships when officers do not have the necessary tools, training, and policy guidance.

Key Actions and Considerations for the Chief of Police

- Review the agency's current policy and utilize the sample Animal Control Policy, available in the [Law Enforcement Accreditation Plus Portal](#), to evaluate any considerations for change as appropriate.
- Providing strong policy guidance for officers is essential, and some important considerations include:
 - **Appropriate Definitions:** Officers should have a clear understanding of critical definitions, such as *Animal Cruelty*, *Animal Sexual Abuse*, *Intentional Animal Abuse and Torture*, and more. Understanding the possible nexus between animal abuse and humans begins with appropriately defined terminology.
 - **Animal Complaint Procedures:** Policies should include specific guidance concerning options for handling wildlife, domestic animals, injured animals, stray animals, abused animals, and vicious animals. Although the use of force, including deadly force, might be necessary in some instances, it's critical that officers understand that such force should be a last resort when possible. Incidents involving officers who have utilized deadly force during animal encounters have resulted in public outrage and costly settlements.⁴
 - **Emergency Animal Euthanasia Procedures:** Officers should know whether they are permitted to put down wildlife, such as deer. Furthermore, when they are permitted to do so, clear policy guidance must exist concerning the established procedures, safety protocols, and training.
 - **Rabies Guidance:** Rabies can be a serious disease, and agency policies should specify appropriate follow-up procedures for animals and humans that might have been exposed to an infected animal, which includes police officers. Absent established procedures, officers might have to undergo potentially unnecessary rabies vaccination protocols, which are incredibly costly and inconvenient.

- **Investigation Protocols:** Animal incidents can create significant community concern and sometimes generate robust social media conversations. Agencies with detailed investigative procedures can help insulate themselves from potential criticism from the community.
- **Emergency Animal Access:** Officers may sometimes be confronted with an incident where an animal's life is in imminent danger. The agency should establish policy guidance so that officers know that it might be appropriate for them to take action to save an animal, such as when an animal is left in a vehicle during extreme weather.
- **Training:** The key to understanding the connection between violence against animals and violence against humans starts with training. Furthermore, appropriately training officers will help build community trust, as many community members feel a sense of urgency to help animals. Agencies that choose to permit officers to put down critically injured wildlife should have strong policy guidance and a dedicated training program to protect the agency, the community, and all officers.

Additional Consideration for the Chief of Police

- Review the Fire and EMS Bulletin, Animal Interactions Best Practices, available in [MSI Fire and EMS Bulletins](#).

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant.

¹Animal Legal Defense Fund. (2023). *The Link Between Cruelty to Animals and Violence Toward Humans*. Animal Legal Defense Fund.

²Robinson, C. M., & Clausen, M. (2021). *The Link Between Animal Cruelty and Human Violence*.

³Julia Palais, P. (2020, December). Animal Cruelty Hurts People Too. *Police Chief Magazine*, pp. 42-48.

⁴Griffith, D. (2024, October 29). Can Police Stop Killing Dogs. *Police*.