

IV. FIELD OPERATIONS

This section reviews the *Field Operations* of the Animal Control Services Division.

A. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

General

A field services program cannot be strong and effective if it is merely a trucking operation that picks up stray and unwanted animals. It can be a viable program of animal control and rescue that contributes to the education of the community and helps to win public support for and compliance with the jurisdiction's animal control program. In an effective and humane field services program, personnel carry out the following duties:

- ◆ Patrol the community on a regular schedule to help make the public aware of animal control and to enforce the local ordinance
- ◆ Enforce all licensing and permit provisions of the applicable local and state laws
- ◆ Impound unregistered (unlicensed) animals running at large and issue violation notices for registered animals running at large
- ◆ Issue a citation (much like a traffic ticket) to people found violating animal laws
- ◆ Inspect commercial animal establishments and other premises that are required to have a permit (for example, pet shops)
- ◆ Investigate cruelty cases and handle all complaints related to animals and animal welfare
- ◆ Rescue animals in danger or distress on an emergency basis 24 hours a day
- ◆ Educate the public about responsible animal care, safe confinement, and restraint techniques.

A 1997 study conducted by the National Animal Control Association (NACA) found the average ratio of field animal control officers to citizens was one officer for every 16,000 to 18,000 persons. To determine optimum field staffing, local governments must factor in population, the size of the service area, and enforcement responsibilities. NACA also recommends that local governments base staffing levels on a call-for-service model: the government should analyze service calls and measure the demand for animal control services.”¹

As California’s population increases and expands into areas once considered rural, the workload of animal control field personnel increases and changes. Animal control service requests are generated by citizen requests for service. Few agencies have the resources to engage in “unassigned patrols” or “proactive patrolling.” In most large jurisdictions animal control field staff move from one call to the next with no time to take care of general housekeeping activities such as looking for loose dogs or picking up dead animals that are not first called into the agency. Many requests for service involve activities that citizens previously handled themselves

¹ Animal Control Management, International City/County Management Association, 2001, P55

or did not report. Barking dog calls, animal cruelty investigations, and calls involving human interaction with wildlife become more frequent and time consuming as citizens move into once rural areas.

Deployment Of Field Staff

Metro Bakersfield is divided into 4 areas: northeast, northwest, southwest, and southeast, which include the small communities of Arvin and Lamont. There is an officer in each area and 2 “floaters.”

South Kern and West Kern are one area covered by one officer. West Kern includes the small communities of Taft, Dustin Acres, Ford City, Fellows, and Maricopa. South Kern includes the mountain communities south of the grapevine: Frazier Park, Pine Mt. Club, and Lake of the Woods. South Kern is patrolled once per week and as needed in emergencies.

North Kern encompasses the communities of Buttonwillow, Shafter, Wasco, and Lost Hills. One officer covers this area.

Kern River Valley (KRV) has several mountain communities on either side of the Kern River and off the 178 Freeway. The Lake Isabella shelter is located in KRV, and animals impounded in this area go there. One officer covers this area.

The Ridgecrest area is in the northeast portion of Kern County and includes Inyokern, Johannesburg, and Randsburg. One officer covers this area. Animals impounded in this area go to the Ridgecrest shelter.

The Mojave area encompasses Tehachapi, Mojave, Boron, Stallion Springs, and Bear Valley Springs. Two officers are meant to cover this area; currently one Officer covers this area and another Officer assists 2 to 3 days per week. Animals impounded go to the Mojave shelter.

Work Schedule

The Animal Control Services Division provides field animal control service 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. Officers work an 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday shift. Weekend and after-hours calls are handled by three Animal Control Officers: one in metro Bakersfield, one in Ridgecrest/Mojave, and one in the other outlying areas. These Officers receive “availability pay.”

Dog bites, animal cruelty, loose dogs, animal nuisances, and similar calls occur at times other than when animal control officers are available. There are 168 hours in a week. There are 128 hours when animal control is not able to respond to service requests except on an on-call basis. This can and does lead to long response times.

Last year the Division completed over 22,000 field service calls. The Department has contracts with two of the County’s cities to provide field service: Maricopa and Tehachapi. The County operates two animal shelters in Bakersfield and Mojave and contracts with the cities of Ridgecrest and a private service provider in Lake Isabella for shelter service in these areas. The City of Arvin contracts with the County for shelter services. The City of Bakersfield recently terminated its animal control contract with the S.P.C.A. The city has deployed 4 animal control officers providing approximately 3.5 full time equivalent positions. The City has contracted with

the County for shelter service. The cities of Delano, Shafter, Taft and Wasco operate their own animal control programs.

<u>Kern County</u>	<u>Population</u>
Arvin	14,966
Bakersfield	295,893
California City	11,504
Delano	45,056
Maricopa	1,147
McFarland	12,179
Ridgecrest	26,493
Shafter	14,113
Taft	9,052
Tehachapi	11,907
Wasco	23,708
Incorporated	466,018
Unincorporated	287,052
County Total	753,070
County Field Service Area	315,072
County Shelter Service Area	610,965

Animal Services Officers are not peace officers but may exercise the powers of arrest of a peace officer as specified in California Penal Code Section 836. They have the power to serve warrants as specified in California Penal Code Sections 1523 and 1530 during the course and within the scope of their employment, if those officers successfully complete a training course in the exercise of those powers pursuant to California Penal Code Section 832. (Reference California Penal Code Section 830.9).

Animal Control Officers are tasked with enforcing State Laws and the County Animal Control Ordinance within the unincorporated area of the County and within those cities contracting for animal control service. A list of code sections Officers are responsible for enforcing and/or should be familiar with is presented in **Appendix IX**.

Animal Control Officers perform the following typical tasks:

- ◆ Answers complaints concerning animals and takes appropriate action
- ◆ Patrols an assigned area
- ◆ Impounds stray animals
- ◆ Investigates and properly quarantines biting animals
- ◆ Captures or kills, as necessary, suspected rabid and/or unrestrained vicious animals
- ◆ Collects dog license, impounding and care fees, and issues receipts
- ◆ Explains and enforces State and County laws relating to animal control and licensing

- ◆ Issues violation notices and court citations and appears in court as complaining witness
- ◆ Investigates and takes appropriate action to prevent inhumane treatment of animals
- ◆ Prepares written reports of activities and investigations
- ◆ Transports sick, injured or dead animals to the Animal Control Shelter
- ◆ Assists in keeping the Animal Control Shelter clean and orderly
- ◆ Assists in separating all animals that show signs of rabies or other diseases
- ◆ Assists in cleaning and disinfecting facilities and equipment
- ◆ Assists the public in the claiming or adoption of animals
- ◆ Assists in keeping animal records.

Determining Field Staffing Needs

Determining the optimum or desirable number of Animal Control Officers has remained an elusive goal for the profession. Several professional groups have tried to develop a model for justifying the desired level of officers. In some cases, this model appeals to budget officials and executives because of the apparent scientific approach to this issue. Results, however, have been mixed. In some cities the model has done nothing more than measure the volume of work and provides a basis for deploying personnel. The service spectrum in each Animal Control department varies according to the management style and philosophy of the director, policies of government and community expectations. Where cities or agencies only count the calls for service within a community to determine optimum staffing, officer safety, citizen safety and major types of service delivery are not factored into overall staffing needs. In Animal Control work, enforcement responsibilities, population density and diversity, along with coverage area need also be a consideration for future planning. Staffing which is determined solely on the ability “to respond quickly to a call” does not address a basic Animal Control responsibility - protection of people and animals. Policies, and in some instances, ordinances affect staffing needs. In cases where officers can give warnings or educate violators to prevent future occurrences, the officer has spared an animal the distress of impoundment or reduced the possibility of further violations. Attendance in court by officers also affects availability. Although there is no universally accepted scientific methodology for determining the number of Animal Control Officers needed in a given jurisdiction, three models are variously employed in Animal Control in determining an appropriate number of personnel.

- ◆ Some jurisdictions have attempted to evaluate the estimated growth in residential and business activity and predict the need for additional personnel.
- ◆ The use of comparative data from the *National Animal Control Association Data Survey* factoring in population, square miles served, and whenever possible, enforcement responsibilities.
- ◆ The “calls for service” model is used primarily as a workload indicator because the data represents a recognizable and readily measurable demand for Animal Control service. Comparing the number of calls for service from one jurisdiction

to another, however, can be very tenuous, because of the variety of calls and the response to Animal Control efforts to encourage citizens to call on any perceived problem.

“Determining the number of officers requires an assessment of citizen calls, officer-initiated calls, citations, written warnings, assisting outside agencies, the need for safety and security, a flexible beat structure, time spent on investigations, preventive patrol time and the specific types of service that the public wants and expects.

“The basic elements of the “calls for service” model are as follows:

- ◆ Each 8-hour Animal Control position requires 2,920 hours to fill one shift for 365 days.
- ◆ Officer availability for staffing is determined by deducting from 2,080 hours (the maximum for one year), and the time required for vacation, sick leave, court time, “flex” days and training. In using this model, the average number of hours dedicated to Animal Control for Animal Control will be 1,832 hours (a standardized ratio), or 229 days.
- ◆ Determine the relief factor (relating to the number of officers needed to fill one position for the entire year) by dividing the number of days of work required for each beat area in a year (365) by the average number of days officers actually work in a year. In using this ratio, the 365 divided by 229 = 1.60 officers per day, per beat area.

“In most situations, the National Animal Control Association utilizes the “calls for service” model in determining an appropriate number of personnel.”²

The Division provides field service to approximately 315,000 citizens. This equates to 1 officer per 26,250 of population. On average, each Officer is responsible for 667 square miles. This is not a totally accurate assessment in that the majority of Officers are concentrated around the Bakersfield Metro area. Officers assigned to South and East Kern however, are responsible for covering a very large geographic area. Using the NACA formulations noted earlier, Kern County should deploy between 16 and 20 Animal Control Officers.

Animal Cruelty Investigations

One of the concerns expressed during Citygate’s Focus Group meetings and in the Customer Survey involved the perception that the Division is uncaring and/or unwilling to pursue animal cruelty investigations. This perception is not uncommon relative to animal control programs in general and results from: genuine, but at times emotional, responses to stories in the press that are not complete in their detail; a misunderstanding of what constitutes animal cruelty; and lack of understanding relative to the constitutional rights of animal owners. In short, animal control officers must obey the law and cannot take someone’s property i.e. their animal without due process. They may not enter the property of a person without just cause e.g. when an animal is in imminent danger, or where lack of action would result in the animals death or significant injury. To successfully prosecute a case the District Attorney will expect and the courts will

² National Animal Control Association Web Site: <http://www.nacanet.org/staffing.html>

require that all applicable laws are obeyed and the rights of the alleged perpetrator have been respected.

We noted that the Division had difficulty reporting out specifics to us with regard to the volume and nature of animal cruelty investigations during any given year.

See **Appendix VIII** Legal Aspects of Animal Control for a thorough examination of this issue.

Division Vehicles:

The Division has 23 animal control vehicles. 5 have over 100,000 miles, 3 have between 80,000 and 100,000 miles, 8 have between 50,000 and 80,000 miles, 17 have less than 50,000 miles. The Division recently acquired a new livestock trailer, increasing their ability to impound livestock.

Field staff is generally satisfied with the vehicles assigned to the Division. However, the Division does not have a 4-wheel drive vehicle. Access to some areas of the county requires having this capability.

Assigned Animal Control Officer Equipment:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
Name Tag	2	Baton	1
Badge	2	Radio Charger	1
Keys	11	Radio	1
Control Pole –Dog	1	Pager	1
Control Pole-cat	1	Flashlight	1
Jab Stick	1	Gloves-Leather	1
Clipboard	1	Rain Slicker	1
Receipt Book	1	Map Book	1
NTA Holder	1	Camera	1
NTA Book	1	Euthanasia Kit	1
Pepper Spray	1	Lariat	1
Pepper Spray Holder	1	Shovel	1
ASAP	1	Cat Trap	1
ASAP Holder	1	Transfer Cage	1
First Aide Kit	1	Portable File Folder	1

Firearms are used to euthanize animals in the field where other means are impractical or would place the Animal Control Officer in danger. The use of firearms by Animal Control Officers is necessary unless an agency is willing to wait for the arrival of a police officer to perform this task. This might be possible in a city due to the small geographic size and close proximity of police staff. This is not possible in Kern County due to the large geographic area involved.

All staff carry tranquilizer guns in their trucks. Four Officers are issued 12 gauge shotguns. These are the Officers assigned to the Lake Isabella area, Ridgecrest area, the South and West area and the Senior Officer in the Bakersfield metro area. All Officers are required to qualify annually with the shotgun. Firearms training is provided by the Sheriff's Department. In addition, all Officers undergo annual chemical capture/tranquilizer training.

Equipment issued is appropriate and what we examined was in good repair. However, some employees expressed concern relative to the condition of their equipment.

The work of animal control officers involves working with all segments of the community. Some of these individuals can pose a threat of bodily harm. Ballistic protective vests, commonly referred to as “bullet proof vests,” are not provided to Officers.

The Division installed Chameleon software in 1997. This software is cable of generating management reports relative to the performance of field staff among other capabilities. This capability is not being utilized, since regular reports relating to the performance of field staff are not being produced.

The salary of Animal Control Officers is not comparable with that of other classes in the County with similar responsibilities, nor is it commensurate with the duties and responsibilities routinely performed by Animal Control Officers.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE FIELD OPERATIONS

The following recommendations are made in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Field Operations component of Kern County’s animal control program.

Recommendation IV-1: Conduct a thorough study of Kern County’s staffing needs taking into account the “calls for service” model.

The staffing evaluation models presented in this report would suggest that Kern County needs between 16 and 20 Animal Control Officers. More than 16 are required because of the very large size of the County. If the City of Bakersfield were merged with the County Animal Control Program, this number would need to be increased. The large geographic size of Kern County and the current independence of the City of Bakersfield need to be factored into this assessment.

Recommendation IV-2: Change the current shift schedule to provide coverage before 8:00 a.m., after 5:00 p.m., and on weekends.

At such time that the Animal Control Officer staff is increased, the hours of operations should be changed to provide coverage before 8:00 a.m., after 5:00 p.m. and on weekends. The current shift schedule does not provide the citizens of the County with adequate coverage. Animal problems are not restricted to an 8 to 5 schedule. Utilizing on-call personnel for after-hours and weekend calls is inefficient and leads to long response times.

Recommendation IV-3: Provide ballistic protective vests to those officers who wish to wear them.

Animal Services Officers are in constant contact with all strata of the community. Some of these individuals have criminal records and can react violently and unpredictably to situations that are not to their liking. Animal Control Officers are tasked with the issuance of court citations and the impoundment of animals from these individuals.

Recommendation IV-4: Utilize the Chameleon system to generate field performance reports. Use these reports to evaluate and motivate field staff.

The Chameleon computer software is capable of tracking all aspects of the Division's performance. The software is based on a relational database that allows the extraction of data through provided reports or the generation of specific reports through the Crystal Reports report software module. This capability is not being utilized. Officer performance is not tracked and used as part of an on-going evaluation process.

Recommendation IV-5: Re-title Animal Control Officer to Animal Control Officer I.

Rewrite the job description to designate this as the entry level in the series. Establish the class of Animal Control Officer II. Designate this as the journey level class. Restrict movement into this class to those who have demonstrated competence in specified job knowledge and abilities.

Recommendation IV-6: Respond promptly to Officer requests to repair or replace equipment.

Animal Control Officers are required to impound fractious animals. To do so safely requires proper functioning catch poles cages, halters and other capture equipment. The proper and prompt repair and/or replacement of this equipment is essential for Officer safety. This was an issue of concern expressed in Citygate's Employee Survey. The Division should procure sufficient inventory of equipment to assure timely replacement.

Recommendation IV-7: Order the next two animal control vehicles with four-wheel drive.

The terrain of Kern County is hilly and rough. The completion of some animal control calls requires going off-road. Current vehicles lack this capability.