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## **Lots of criticism in Humane Society shelter report**

**Carrie Covell**

SLO County Animal Services, a source of both government and community scrutiny over the past year, is under the microscope once again in a new report by the Humane Society of the United States reviewing shelter policies and procedures.

The report, commissioned by Sheriff Pat Hedges and the County Board of Supervisors as part of ongoing examination of the animal services department, is based on a review conducted by the Humane Society in March and is summarized in a neat 1,000 words on the SLO County Web site.

The 205-page report makes recommendations for every division of the shelter's operations. While there is some positive feedback, the report is chocked-full of criticisms. During their evaluation, the Humane Society reviewers reported observing:

- Inhumane treatment of dogs, cats, and a rabbit by County Jail Honor Farm inmates.
- A cat with an untreated, open, draining sore over one eye.
- A dog with an untreated, widespread lesion on one leg.
- A dog, post-surgery, in apparent untreated pain.
- Multiple incidents of failure to administer proper medication to cats.
- An overall impression of a lack of care for cats, in comparison to dogs, by shelter staff.
- A dog running loose in the kennel, and reports by staff of frequent escapes by dogs from outdoor yards due to improper fencing.
- Sharp edges, broken chain-links, and excessive dirt in dog runs.
- Employee concern over their lack of proper training in how to decapitate rabies-infected animals.
- Uncovered and spilled food and piles of debris, despite staff reports of recent rodent infestations
- No formal emergency preparedness training for staff and volunteers.
- No formal training for staff or volunteers regarding zoonotic diseases.

- Improper identification of animals.
- Insufficient record keeping.
- Improper vaccine protocol.
- Improper feeding procedures.
- Insufficient cleaning procedures.
- A lack of protocol for euthanasia procedures.
- Employee reports of theft of needles and syringes by Honor Farm inmates.

The report recommends that the shelter form a task force to address the issues presented.

The County Board of Supervisors is also working on a response to an accusation by the county grand jury that the jury was inhibited by the board in its review of the animal services division. A draft report suggests they'll deny the charge. The board is also considering making Animal Services a "stand-alone" department at the request of the Sheriff's Department.

Shelter Director Eric Anderson didn't return a recent call from the New Times for comment, but in an interview before the report was public he said it didn't contain any major surprises.

"There's certainly a lot of information there, a lot of good information, and it certainly identifies ways we can grow and continue to improve, as well."

He said new staffing and facility improvements will allow the shelter to address many of the concerns.

More broadly, he emphasized that the sort of problems that were outlined in the report, and which led to the grand jury inquiry, reflect the tensions of running an "open-intake" shelter that doesn't turn any animals away and must accept animals in all shapes and conditions.

Beau Archer, Shelter Services Coordinator for the Humane Society Animal Services Consultation and member of the seven-person team that conducted the Humane Society survey, said he thinks that while the Humane Society report is extensive in its findings, the county is on its way to improving Animal Services, saying, "The attention that Animal Services is getting from the county is really great and hopefully will push the organization forward."