



Shelter Terminology

Last reviewed: February 2017

Introduction

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians supports the development of animal shelter operational policies based on an organization's capacity for humane care and available resources, regardless of organizational philosophy. The guiding principle in the provision of humane care should always be animals' needs, which remain the same regardless of an organization's mission or challenges in meeting those needs.

It is commonplace for humane organizations to describe their work philosophy through the use of popular terminology. However, such language often lacks clear and consistent definitions which has led to confusion, misperception, and discord in many communities.

The ASV supports the Guiding Principles of the Asilomar Accords in their urge for organizations "to discuss language and terminology which has been historically viewed as hurtful or divisive by some animal welfare stakeholders (whether intentional or inadvertent), identify 'problem' language, and reach a consensus to modify or phase out language and terminology accordingly."¹ The ASV encourages sheltering organizations to define, adopt, and utilize language that describes their work clearly and consistently to both internal and external stakeholders. To that end, this document is meant to summarize the common ways in which sheltering language is used within the animal welfare field so that this information can be considered by organizations trying to refine the language they use to describe their own work.

General Language

Community Cats are free roaming feral, stray, abandoned or lost cats living outside with or without an owner or caretaker. The terms community cat, feral, and free roaming are sometimes used interchangeably.

Free-Roaming Cats are not confined to a yard or house, may or may not have an owner, and may be tame or feral. Use of this term is based on the confinement status of the cat rather than ownership status or degree of socialization.²

Feral Cats are not socialized to and are extremely fearful of contact with people. Typically, their welfare cannot be maintained in captivity.

Animal Control facilities are usually governmentally operated at the county or city level, or through joint powers of authority between two or more municipalities. Their primary purposes generally include the housing of stray animals through mandated holding periods, enforcement of animal control and cruelty ordinances, lost and found services and operation of programs to control the spread of rabies. Animal control facilities may also refer to themselves as animal shelters and offer some of the same services.

Traditional Animal Shelters are animal housing facilities that, depending upon the source of funding and organizational mission, maintain a partnership between private and government agencies. They may provide housing for stray animals through mandated holding periods, offer temporary housing of homeless animals, and accept animals surrendered by their owners. **Humane Society** or **Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)** may also be used to describe these shelters, which may also offer a variety of veterinary, public health, humane education and community oriented services. It should be noted that local community SPCAs and Humane Societies operate independently of each other and are not members of national animal welfare organizations.

Animal Sanctuaries are typically long-term or permanent housing solutions for homeless or unadoptable animals that are privately run and funded.

Rescue Groups are often operated by a network of foster home-based volunteers that may or may not be associated with a standing facility. These organizations often accept difficult-to-adopt animals from other shelters and may transfer them or facilitate adoptions outside of the shelter setting.

TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return/Release/Relocate) refers to an approach for managing community cats that is an alternative to shelter impoundment.³ In appropriately managed TNR programs, cats are humanely trapped and surgically sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped. The “R” may refer to Return, Release or Relocate and can encompass several outcomes: return to a managed colony or place of origin, release to the place of capture, or relocation to a new site with or without management by a designated caretaker. The designation of “TNR” does not indicate which of these outcomes is utilized.

Shelter-Neuter-Return (SNR) is a term used to describe a process similar to **TNR**, but in SNR programs cats are impounded temporarily at the sheltering organization prior to sterilization and release or return. As in TNR, SNR cats are surgically sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped. The outcomes are similar to TNR: return to the managed colony of origin, release to the place of capture, or relocation to a new site with or without management by a designated caretaker. Release to the place of capture is the most common SNR practice. The practice is also referred to as Return-To-Field (RTF).

Animal Intake

Open Admission shelters are traditionally operated by municipalities or hold animal control contracts for municipalities. Although the term “open” may imply unrestricted intake policies for all animals, admissions are often restricted by criteria such as municipal borders or defined hours of animal intake. Additionally, open admission shelters may decline owner-surrendered animals if their role is strictly limited to stray animal control or certain species (e.g., cats) in accordance with their legal mandate.

In **Managed Admission** shelters, owner surrender of animals is scheduled by appointment in order to match the flow of animals coming into the facility to the available space and resources. Shelters may differ in the services or alternatives they offer during the waiting period until intake can be accomplished. Managed admission shelters may also hold animal control or municipal contracts by which they must maintain open admission policies for animals subject to such agreements.

Limited Admission shelters are typically privately-funded shelters without municipal roles or animal control contracts. As a private organization, the shelter may accept animals based on self-defined criteria and mission. Because they are not publicly funded, limited admission shelters are under no obligation to take stray animals, and often focus on services for owner-surrendered animals.

Animal Disposition

Adoption Guarantee has been utilized to describe the operational philosophy of sheltering organizations. This language is often used interchangeably with “no kill” with all of the same variations in meaning. For example, organizations may variably use this term to indicate that all animals entering a sheltering program will remain there until adopted, only medically or behaviorally healthy or treatable animals will be cared for until adoption, or that only animals for which an adoption can be guaranteed are admitted into the organization’s care. Actual admission, adoption, or euthanasia practices of an organization cannot be inferred by the use of this terminology.

High Kill and **Low Kill** have been utilized as descriptions of the euthanasia rates of sheltering organizations. Standardized definitions of these terms do not exist; the determination of where a particular sheltering organization’s euthanasia rate falls along the spectrum from high to low is subjective. For this reason, the actual euthanasia practices of an organization cannot be inferred reliably by use of this terminology.

No Kill came into popular usage in the 1980’s as efforts in the humane movement advanced toward ending the euthanasia of healthy animals in shelters and humane organizations.⁴ Practices of no kill shelters vary along a spectrum that reject the use of euthanasia as a primary means of population control and health management. Examples may include shelters whose policies or protocols prevent euthanasia of animals for lack of housing; those that prevent euthanasia of behaviorally or medically healthy animals; those that prevent euthanasia of animals with conditions considered treatable by reasonable pet owners in their community; or those that prohibit euthanasia of animals for any reason. Historically, no kill shelters often sought to attain a designated **Live Release Rate** (most often 90%). Because of these variations, the actual euthanasia practices of an organization cannot be inferred reliably by the use of this terminology.

Statistical Analysis

Capacity for Care is an organization’s ability to appropriately care for the animals it serves. This is based on a range of parameters including, but not limited to, the number of appropriate housing units; staffing for programs or services; staff training; average length of stay; and the total number of reclaims, adoptions, transfers, releases, or other outcomes.

Live Release Rate (LRR) is an indication of the number of animals leaving a facility by means other than euthanasia or in-shelter death. Live outcomes are usually achieved through adoption, reclaim by owner, transfer to another agency or other life-saving actions. LRR is usually expressed by a percentage that can be calculated in three ways, depending on organizational preferences.⁵

The first method quantifies live outcomes as a proportion of animals admitted. It is calculated by dividing the total number of live outcomes by the total number of live intakes in a given period of time.

The second method quantifies live outcomes as a proportion of animals that reached a final disposition. It is calculated by dividing the total number of live outcomes by the total number of outcomes (including euthanasia and in-shelter deaths). This method will exclude animals that are still within the shelter's care.

The third method quantifies live outcomes based on the number of animals admitted that were not euthanized (i.e., intake minus euthanasia) divided by the total number of intakes.

Save Rate is also frequently used interchangeably with "live release rate"; however, it may refer to a number of different methods for calculating this statistic.

References

¹The Asilomar Accords. Guiding Principles. Available online at: <http://www.shelteranimalscount.org/docs/default-source/DataResources/2004aaccords5.pdf?sfvrsn=0>. Accessed November 8, 2016.

²Levy, J.K., Crawford, P.C., 2004. Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 225 (9) 1354-1360.

³Levy, J.K., Isaza, N.M., Scott, K.C., 2014. Effect of high-impact targeted trap-neuter-return and adoption of community cats on cat intake to a shelter. *The Veterinary Journal* 201, 269-274.

⁴Zawistowski S, Morris J. Introduction to Animal Sheltering. In: Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff, 2nd Edition. Wiley-Blackwell, Ames. 2013. p. 3-12.

⁵National Federation of Humane Societies. What is Your Rate? Available at: http://aspcapro.org/sites/pro/files/What%20is%20your%20Rate%2010_2013.pdf. Accessed November 8, 2016.