

10. Euthanasia

10.1 General

All animals and people must be treated with respect during the euthanasia process, whether euthanasia is performed in the shelter, the field, or a home setting. The euthanasia process must be as free from pain, fear, anxiety, and distress as possible. A veterinarian with appropriate training and expertise should be consulted when establishing euthanasia protocols. Agents and methods deemed unacceptable in the AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals are unacceptable for use in shelters.

10.2 Euthanasia process

Euthanasia protocols must be created and followed to support consistent practices. Protocols include euthanasia drugs, delivery methods, handling plans, and environmental conditions, and should have options to accommodate individual animal's behavioral and physical needs and ensure human safety.

Using multiple methods to confirm an animal's identity prior to euthanasia is important, including shelter records, enclosure labels, collars, tags, physical descriptions, and consulting people familiar with the animal. For stray animals, a final check of local missing animal listings should be performed to confirm that there are no matches. Immediately prior to euthanasia, animals must be scanned for a microchip.

It is unacceptable to euthanize an animal without verifying legal eligibility, which includes verification that the organization owns or has legal responsibility for the animal (e.g. the animal is not on a court ordered or mandated stray hold), or the organization has consent from the animal's owner, or the animal has a documented need for immediate euthanasia to alleviate suffering.

After the euthanasia procedure, death must be verified by trained staff before disposing of the animal's body. Proper verification of death always includes confirmation of cardiac standstill or rigor mortis.

10.2.1 Euthanasia methods: Euthanasia methods must be reliable, irreversible, compatible with the species, age, health and behavior of the animal, and ensure a smooth loss of consciousness followed by death. The use of pre-euthanasia sedation is generally recommended because it improves the experience for animals and personnel. While necessary in rare occasions in the field, gunshot is unacceptable as a routine method for euthanasia of dogs, cats, or other small companion animals. Inhalation of carbon monoxide is an unacceptable method of euthanasia for companion animals in shelters.

10.3 Environment and equipment

A separate room should be designated for euthanasia in a quiet area. Soft bedding, calm music, and comforting experiences are often beneficial for socialized animals. Other animals, such as wildlife and feral cats, are better served by minimal interaction and opportunities to hide.

All equipment used during the euthanasia process must be easily accessible and in good working order. Euthanasia equipment and surfaces should be cleaned after each use, and the entire room should be sanitized regularly. All drugs used during the euthanasia process must be stored, administered, and documented in accordance with federal and state regulations. Disposal of animal remains must comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

10.4 Personnel considerations

Personnel performing euthanasia must be appropriately trained and maintain all necessary required local and state certifications. The safety and well-being of personnel must be incorporated into euthanasia protocols; systems must be in place to prevent, recognize, and address fatigue and distress related to euthanasia in shelter personnel.

*See the full guidelines for references and supporting documents:
<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/issue/view/2>*