

# American Humane Association Animal Welfare Policy and Position Statements



American Humane Association™

The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals™

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## Mission

*To ensure the welfare, wellness and well-being of children and animals, and to unleash the full potential of the bond between humans and animals to the mutual benefit of both.*

## Values

- We are dedicated to the protection of society's most vulnerable: children and animals.
- We recognize the connection we share as living beings and are committed to the importance of the human animal bond in its many aspects and understanding its role in society.
- We are committed to continuous improvement of the welfare of animals.
- We are committed to advancing animal welfare and the human animal bond based on the best science available and through collaboration with internal and external stakeholders to understand concerns, opportunities, and priorities.
- We will regularly assess action and demonstrate progress towards our goals and vision.



## Animal Welfare Policy Framework and Guiding Principles

*“Our efforts have been successful in large part because they align so closely with timeless and deeply rooted core American values such as caring, compassion and hope.”*



Since 1877, American Humane Association has been at the forefront of virtually every significant advance in public attitudes, enactment of groundbreaking legislation, and shift in societal norms when it comes to ensuring the welfare and well-being of animals. Through our leadership, programs and initiatives at the local, regional and national levels, we directly improve the lives of millions of animals each year, and prevent the unnecessary suffering of millions more.

Our efforts have been successful in large part because they align so closely with timeless and deeply rooted core American values such as caring, compassion and hope. The ability to translate those values into concrete, effective policy solutions stems from an approach that places the dignity and respect for animals at a paramount level, while recognizing the realities of our ever-evolving society.

At the heart of our work is the understanding that humans and animals interact in numerous, complex and dynamic ways. For instance, we recognize the fact that millions of Americans choose to use animals as food on a daily basis. But we are equally cognizant of the fact that many other people find that act on its face unconscionably cruel. The same can be said of human beings' relationships with animal athletes, animal soldiers, animal first responders, animal actors, therapy animals, animal companions or any of the other animals that populate our lives.

Our goal, therefore, is to ensure that wherever animals and humans intersect, the unique needs of animals are identified and upheld. Underpinning all our animal welfare policies is a set of principles laid out nearly a half-century ago known as the Five Freedoms. Developed in the United Kingdom in 1965, they have stood the test of time and become the international standard for the humane treatment of animals:

1. **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.
2. **Freedom from Discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. **Freedom to Express Normal Behavior** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. **Freedom from Fear and Distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Building on these Freedoms and applying them in a real-world context, our position statements reflect the latest science and the newest thinking as identified by experts in animal behavior, veterinary medicine, animal husbandry and other fields; professional and volunteer animal protection officers and enthusiasts; stakeholders from the worlds of academia, the first responder community, the entertainment industry, farming and ranching, the animal care industry and others; and a cadre of psychologists, ethicists, anthropologists and others who can speak to the human side of the equation.

Animals cannot speak up for themselves, and no one can claim to know their thoughts. However, for nearly 150 years – through a deliberate, action-oriented, science-based approach – American Humane Association has ensured that our nation gives them voice. To view our position papers, [click here](#).

## American Humane Association Position Statement on **Animals in Disaster**

*“Only personnel experienced and appropriately trained in animal behavior should attempt to rescue and provide emergency sheltering for animals in emergency and disaster situations.”*

American Humane Association’s Red Star™ Animal Emergency Services program was founded in 1916 when the U.S. Secretary of War asked American Humane to report to the battlefields of WWI to rescue war horses. Since that time and for almost one hundred years, Red Star has responded to disasters impacting communities around the globe in time of disaster and crisis for animals.

American Humane Association advocates that companion animal evacuation and emergency sheltering development, planning and exercise must be incorporated into multi-jurisdictional disaster preparedness planning. Such planning must also assure that communities are provided with the necessary skill-based training and expertise to ensure the safe evacuation and sheltering of both animals and people in a variety of emergency and disaster situations and environments. Only personnel experienced and appropriately trained in animal behavior should attempt to rescue and provide emergency sheltering for animals in emergency and disaster situations.

American Humane Association advocates for the provision and improvement of the response capacity needed at local, state and Federal levels to answer complexities inherent in companion animal evacuation and emergency sheltering challenges. This capacity should be achieved:

- Through all companion animal owning households having a pre-existing emergency plan that includes both the humans and the companion animals resident in that household;
- Through the consideration and inclusion of companion animals in all appropriate emergency management funding, plans, annexes and exercises;
- Through the provision of animal disaster training programs to all appropriate stakeholders and responders to include private business owners, state and county emergency preparedness teams, animal welfare groups, local volunteers; government and private relief agencies tasked with the duties of local preparedness and response during an emergency or disaster.



## American Humane Association Position Statement on **Animals in Entertainment**

*“Further, American Humane Association believes all training of animals used in entertainment should be humane and based on positive reinforcement techniques.”*

American Humane Association’s Film and Television Unit was founded in 1940 to provide for protections for animal actors in entertainment. The No Animals Were Harmed® certification program promotes evidence-based standards to ensure the humane treatment, welfare and well-being of animals working in entertainment.

American Humane Association opposes any form of entertainment that features or involves the abuse of animals of any breed or species, and any legislation that would legalize such practices. When animals are involved in entertainment, they must be treated humanely at all times and they must be transported in a humane and safe manner that includes security from injury, sufficient space, frequent stops for natural exercise and rest, and appropriate provision of water, environmental temperature, air quality, and food, plus attention to cleanliness and hygiene needs.

American Humane Association, as an animal advocacy organization, acknowledges that a wide range of entertainment venues, many of which cross over from performing animals to animals used in sporting competitions, are an ongoing part of our society and culture and that it is a reality that animals are and will continue to be used in these entertainment venues. As such, we support improvements in animal welfare legislation regarding these venues and take the position that when animals are used in legal entertainment venues, a high standard of care should be in place. Further, American Humane Association believes all training of animals used in entertainment should be humane and based on positive reinforcement techniques.

American Humane Association also supports a humane retirement for all animals used in entertainment venues. We do not condone when retired animals in entertainment are abandoned to sub-standard facilities, canned hunts, slaughter facilities or invasive research.



## American Humane Association Position Statement on **Animals in Research**

*“It is incumbent upon every scientist to conduct extensive literature searches (U.S. and foreign), and to gather background information from multiple venues, prior to launching a study that involves animals.”*

American Humane Association advocates that every effort is made to ensure that no harm comes to any animal who participates in a research study. American Humane Association believes that there is much to learn about animals living closely to humans – in our homes, on our farms, and in natural environments around us. While such environments are complex, variables in these complex environments contribute to health and welfare and need to be studied and assessed.

While scientific progress has resulted from many experiments using laboratory animals, some projects in the past were poorly designed, unnecessary and inhumane. In any research project using laboratory animals, there should always be direct oversight by properly credentialed researchers, with all institutional and governmental regulations concerning animal research strictly adhered to. Animals used in research should have environments that provide safety, comfort, cleanliness and enrichment. Pain and fear should be controlled. There should be a clear-cut expectation that the experiment will contribute significantly to knowledge that will ultimately benefit animals and humans. In all cases the appropriate number of animals should be used for scientific validity and outcomes. Laboratory animals should not include those from animal shelters or animal control facilities, nor should they include other animals with unknown histories. Animals with unknown medical histories or drug administration can confound a scientific study.

It is incumbent upon every scientist to conduct extensive literature searches (U.S. and foreign), and to gather background information from multiple venues, prior to launching a study that involves animals. Research results, whether positive or negative, should be broadly disseminated and shared so as to reduce the number of studies and, therefore, the number of animals used in research. The goal for any scientific inquiry should be for a discovery that might advance animal or human health and/or welfare. In addition to funding research to treat disease, American Humane Association strongly supports prevention research that keeps animals and humans healthy.

American Humane Association acknowledges that legal requirements may necessitate animal testing before vaccines, drugs and other products can be approved for use. Many of these products are needed to advance human and animal health. American Humane Association supports changes in laws and regulations to eliminate unnecessary animal research and applauds those industries and governments that support scientific advancements for non-animal (alternative) testing. For research funded by the American Humane Association, scientists must agree that no animals will be harmed (e.g., no induction of illness or injury) and terminal endpoints are not allowed.



# American Humane Association Position Statement on **Animal Population Control**

*“Every year, millions of cats and dogs are euthanized in our nation’s animal shelters because there are more pets than there are responsible homes for them.”*

## **Pet Overpopulation**

Pet “overpopulation” encompasses two primary factors: (1) allowing cats and dogs to reproduce with little chance to find homes for the offspring and (2) pets being relinquished by owners who can no longer keep their animals, or who no longer want them.

Every year, millions of cats and dogs are euthanized in our nation’s animal shelters because there are more pets than there are responsible homes for them. Until this issue is resolved, American Humane Association believes that all cats and dogs adopted from public or private animal care and control facilities should be spayed or neutered (i.e., sterilized). Such sterilization includes prepubertal spaying and neutering of kittens and puppies. American Humane Association supports the passage of laws and regulations mandating that all cats and dogs adopted from public or private animal care and control facilities be sterilized. It is less certain that community-wide mandatory spay/neuter laws are effective in addressing pet overpopulation. More information needs to be gathered on the benefit of prior legislative initiatives to determine long-term benefits.

American Humane Association encourages the veterinary profession to assist, whenever and however possible, in reducing the number of unwanted pets. This involvement includes supporting the neutering of cats and dogs adopted from public or private animal care and control facilities – thereby controlling the ongoing contribution of offspring to pet overpopulation. Veterinarians should continue to use their best judgment when recommending appropriate sterilization ages for individual cats and dogs owned by clients, especially those clients who are well-known and likely to permit an unwanted pregnancy to occur prior to surgery. Short-term and long-term health risks for each animal should always be assessed. American Humane Association encourages research into the development and use of nonsurgical methods of sterilization.

American Humane Association also supports research to assess the causes for pet relinquishment. Prior research studies suggest that 7 to 20 percent of pets entering a home are no longer in that home six months after acquisition. These animals often end up at shelters, contributing to the pet “overpopulation” issue. Thus, American Humane Association wishes to understand individual, cultural and community issues that lead to pet relinquishment and to develop practical and effective intervention strategies.





## Puppy Mills and Mass Breeding

*“American Humane Association opposes the unregulated mass breeding of puppies for the pet market.”*

The mass breeding of dogs for the commercial pet market has resulted in numerous large-scale breeding operations referred to as “puppy mills.” Most of these operations are not regulated or audited to ensure proper husbandry (food, water, housing, etc.), veterinary care, socialization, exercise, ability to express normal behavior, and freedom from fear or distress. For the breeding adults and the puppies born in these facilities, neglect of emotional needs due to lack of socialization, isolation and the trauma of transportation at an early age are serious problems which can lead to ongoing health and/or behavioral problems. Lack of knowledge about genetic diseases and proper breeding regimes to reduce health issues can result in future suffering for both adults and puppies. American Humane Association opposes the unregulated mass breeding of puppies for the pet market. American Humane Association also supports the regulation of pet sales through the Internet, wanting each and every new pet to arrive at a new home in a physically and emotionally healthy state.



## Cat Colonies

American Humane Association has a long history of concern for the humane treatment and responsible ownership of cats. The population of cats in the U.S. without homes is large, with many communities reporting increased numbers of cats entering shelters, and increased numbers of cats being euthanized. Most healthy cats entering U.S. shelters do not find homes. In some situations, safe cat colonies can be maintained by caretakers. American Humane Association supports trap, neuter and release programs for colony cats – especially for feral cats. Whenever possible, homes should be found for colony cats that might be successfully socialized to live in a good home. National data suggest that cats receive less veterinary care, trend higher for intakes at shelters, and are more likely to be euthanized than dogs. In spite of being America’s most popular pet, these animals receive far too little support for their unique issues.

*“American Humane Association supports the responsible breeding of horses with the goal that each foal born has the opportunity to live a healthy, safe and full life.”*



## **Horse Overpopulation**

The issue of surplus horses may result from uncontrolled, or inappropriately planned, reproduction, and also when owners no longer can keep, or want, their animals. Some unwanted horses may be old, injured or ill, express undesirable behaviors and/or fail to meet their owner's desires. Normal, healthy horses of varying ages and breeds may also become unwanted. Economic, and many other factors, likely result in animals being rejected. Because our nation's animal care and control facilities rarely accept horses relinquished by owners, and because euthanizing and disposing of an unwanted horse is costly, these animals may be at risk for abandonment and suffering.

American Humane Association supports the responsible breeding of horses with the goal that each foal born has the opportunity to live a healthy, safe and full life. When horses are unhealthy and suffer from illness or injury, it may be best to end the suffering of certain animals with humane euthanasia. American Humane Association supports the collaboration between partners from the equine industry, animal welfare agencies, regulatory agencies, academic scientists and others, to address how humane euthanasia and alternatives might be made available to owners at affordable costs.

American Humane Association encourages research into the development and use of nonsurgical methods of sterilization, and research that carefully evaluates risk-factors for relinquishment or abandonment.

## **Wildlife**

American Humane Association supports careful assessment and planning on how to properly control wildlife populations so that animal numbers are appropriate for sustaining good health and welfare. In some cases, this would mean controlling the population of a species that can no longer be sustained in an environment of diminished resources, or is threatening to overcome other native species. In other cases, this would mean supporting reproduction of endangered species and working to develop species protection plans for saving a species and allowing for the proper reintroduction of animals into an appropriate habitat.

## **Wild and Exotic Animals as Pets**

When wild or exotic animals are kept as pets, the result is usually tragic for the animal and often negative for the owner. Lack of knowledge about behavioral traits, social needs and proper nutrition may lead to inadvertent neglect. For many of the larger wild or exotic species, the cost of feed, veterinary care, handling equipment and confinement facilities may be prohibitive. The release or abandonment of non-native wildlife or exotic animals into the natural environment can create severe or catastrophic impacts to the native ecology. Federal, state and regional laws and regulations may prohibit the ownership of some animals, and some species are at higher risk to transmit diseases to humans. American Humane Association opposes the deliberate capture, confinement, breeding, or the hybrid breeding, of wild or exotic animals as pets and also opposes their release into non-native environments.

## American Humane Association Position Statement on **Animal Cruelty**

*“We also recognize that acts of passive cruelty or neglect often require advocacy, education and other forms of intervention as well as appropriate legal action.”*

American Humane Association opposes all acts of intentional or active cruelty toward animals and advocates for the appropriate protection of animals under law. We also recognize that acts of passive cruelty or neglect often require advocacy, education and other forms of intervention as well as appropriate legal action.

Further, we believe that acts of intentional animal cruelty may be indicators of serious psychological pathology and that the infliction of violence on animals is often a precursor to acts of violence perpetrated on vulnerable humans, including women and children, and should be recognized as such by legal and societal institutions in the creation of appropriate legal and societal processes and structures.



## American Humane Association Position Statement on **Farm Animal Welfare**

*“Every sentient, living being subjected to direct human control should have an opportunity to experience an environment for which its own genotype is predisposed in order to develop into a physically and psychologically healthy animal.”*

American Humane Association understands that people will make personal choices about their diet but believes that no one has the right to treat animals raised for food inhumanely.

Every sentient, living being subjected to direct human control should have an opportunity to experience an environment for which its own genotype is predisposed in order to develop into a physically and psychologically healthy animal. All farm animals should have the benefits of:

- Adequate air, water, and feed supply, according to their biological requirements.
- Safe housing and a sufficient amount of space to prevent injuries or atrophies and ensure normal growth.
- Appropriate levels of environmental complexity to prevent harmful deprivation, boredom or aversive stimulation and fear.
- Regular daily supervision and effective health care to minimize undetected accidents, injuries, or illness and the initiation of prompt assistance.
- Sensible handling in all stages of their life to avoid unnecessary stress or suffering.



## American Humane Association Position Statement on **Therapy Animals**

*“Participating animals must be domesticated animals who have been humanely trained and are humanely treated.”*

American Humane Association supports animal-assisted therapy programs under strict conditions:

- Participating animal handlers should be trained and certified and have the established right to use the animal in a therapy setting.
- Participating animals must be domesticated animals who have been humanely trained and are humanely treated.
- Participating animals’ medical health and behavior should be regularly assessed by a licensed veterinarian and a licensed therapy animal evaluator to ensure the handlers’ and their animals’ appropriateness for animal-assisted therapy service.

American Humane Association advocates for the adherence to a therapeutic animal-assisted interaction protocol that conforms to infection control, risk management and other safety guidelines as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the facility in which the service is provided.

American Humane Association advocates all animal-assisted therapy programs abide by the resolutions adopted by the members of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO), namely the IAHAIO Geneva Declaration and the IAHAIO Prague Declaration, relating to guidelines for human-animal interactions. American Humane Association also advocates animal-assisted therapy programs abide by the Code of Ethics for animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy.



## American Humane Association Position Statement on Service Animals

*“As with all companion animals, we advocate for the responsible and humane care and well-being of the service dog by its trainers and handlers throughout its working life and into retirement.”*

American Humane Association supports the U.S. Department of Justice’s service animal guidelines published in March 2011 outlining:

*“Service animal as any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purposes of this definition. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the handler’s disability. Examples of work or tasks include, but are not limited to, assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing non-violent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, alerting individuals to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors. The crime deterrent effects of an animal’s presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not constitute work or tasks for the purposes of this definition.”*

We support the use of other kinds of domesticated animals as service animals when specifically prescribed by a medical professional. We do not support the use of primate, wildlife or exotic animals as service animals.

American Humane Association advocates the use of service dogs in assisting individuals with disabilities. We recommend that a health care provider provide a medical prescription for the service animal that defines what precise “functions/ behaviors” the dog will provide to the individual, that the service dog is trained using humane methods to provide those functions and that the dog is professionally evaluated for the capability to perform that assistance in a manner safe for both the service dog and its handler. As with all companion animals, we advocate for the responsible and humane care and well-being of the service dog by its trainers and handlers throughout its working life and into retirement.



# American Humane Association™

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