

Animal Transport

Animal shelters may be involved in transport of animals locally, regionally or internationally. The term “animal transport” is typically used to apply to programs in which animals are transferred over some distance from one organization or individual to another. However, the recommendations in this section should apply regardless of the purpose, distances or parties involved, as careful management and planning are always required to ensure animals’ comfort and safety and minimize risk of disease transmission.

For many animals, animal transport is a life saving measure, but it also poses risks. Animal transport programs have the potential to spread infectious diseases along animal transport corridors and to new destinations. The stress of transport may increase susceptibility to infection or increase viral shedding. Risk of exposure to infectious disease is increased when animals who originate from multiple sources are transported in the same vehicle. In addition to affecting the individual animals transported, transportation programs may impact other animals at the source and receiving shelters in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, risks and benefits for all animals affected by a transport program must be carefully weighed. Reasonable care and precautions help minimize the risk, and well planned transport programs can be very successful.

These standards are not intended to apply to disaster situations in which sudden large-scale evacuations are necessary. Exceptions may be necessary for transport in emergency situations, where short-term compromises may have to be made; however, pre-planning for potential disasters is recommended to minimize deviation from accepted transport practices. Compromises should not be made when there is ample opportunity to plan.

1. Responsibilities of Participating Individuals and Organization

a) General

Clear, direct, communication is essential among those involved in any transport program. A written record of all involved parties, including responsibilities for each, should be kept in sufficient detail to allow a trace back to the animal’s origins. A contact person must be identified at each transfer point. Ideally, written guidelines that all parties can agree to should be developed (HSUS 2003; PetSmart 2006). Guidelines should address medical and behavioral selection criteria, as well as transportation and destination requirements. For interstate transport, current rabies vaccination is an import requirement for dogs in all states in the United States. The majority of states also require rabies vaccination for cats. A valid Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (e.g., health certificate) is also required by most states. It is recommended that transporters become familiar with the import requirements for all destinations, which, for states in the United States, are usually regulated by the state Departments of Agriculture and/or Health. Although airline requirements are not legal requirements many airlines have specific requirements for animal passengers.

b) Responsibilities at Point of Origin

The shelter where the animals originate should ideally have a comprehensive preventive healthcare program. Animals destined for transport must be vaccinated prior to or upon intake at the organization of origin and should be treated for internal and external parasites. In addition to any examinations required by state or federal transportation regulations, all animals being transported must be examined within 24 hours of transport for any problems. Animals’ health and behavior, as known at the source shelter, must be accurately described and communicated.

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Clearly written health records that describe health status and identify animals (health certificate, rabies certificate and copy of shelter record) must accompany each animal. Animals should be identified by a collar, tag, tattoo, microchip, or any combination of these methods so that their information can be matched upon arrival. In order to minimize the risk of infectious disease and optimize welfare, animals should be in good health at the time of transport. However, transportation of animals with illness can be justified when life-saving resources, such as medical care and placement opportunities, are available at the destination and when measures can be taken during transport to provide for their comfort, health, and safety.

c) Responsibilities During Transport

Primary Enclosure and Occupancy

The Live Animal Regulations (LAR) issued and maintained by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Animal Welfare Act do not directly apply to surface transport of shelter animals but they are excellent references for animal transportation. Many of the recommendations below are derived from these regulations.

During transport, animals must have adequate space, comfortable environmental conditions, and good air quality. Additionally, drivers should be careful to avoid subjecting animals to sudden acceleration and deceleration stresses, or excessive lateral movement (cornering), noise or vibration.

Primary enclosures must be large enough for animals to stand and sit erect, to turn around normally while standing, and to lie in a natural position. Unfamiliar animals must not be transported together in the same primary enclosure. If more than one animal is in the primary enclosure, there must be enough space for each occupant to lie down comfortably at the same time without needing to lie on top of each other. The enclosure must be sturdy and permit adequate ventilation. There should be no sharp edges. Flooring must prevent injury, discomfort, and leakage of fluids into other enclosures. Absorbent

bedding should be provided. Animals must be safely and securely confined within the enclosure. Doors on primary enclosures must be secured to prevent accidental opening. Primary enclosures must be secured to prevent movement within the vehicle during transport.

Due to increased vulnerability, extra care must be provided when transporting puppies and kittens including: prevention of exposure to temperature extremes; maintenance of adequate hydration and nutrition; and protection from infectious disease exposure during the transport process. Unless orphaned, kittens or puppies less than 8 weeks old should be transported with the mother in a space large enough for her to lie down on her side with legs extended for comfort and to facilitate nursing. Transporting animals under 8 weeks old across state lines is prohibited by some state laws.

Animals should not be sedated unless recommended by a veterinarian because this can make them more vulnerable to hypothermia, dehydration, and injury. If animals are sedated, veterinary guidance must be provided for their care.

Vehicles

Vehicles must, at minimum, adhere to all federal or local statutes, recognizing that these regulations may not be sufficient to ensure animal safety and welfare. Crates and cages must not be stacked upon each other in a manner that increases animal stress and discomfort, compromises ventilation, allows waste material to fall from the cage above into the cage below, interferes with care and observation, or hinders emergency removal.

Each primary enclosure must be positioned in the animal cargo space in a manner that provides protection from the weather and extremes of temperature. As in stationary facilities, the ambient temperature should be kept above 60°F (15.5°C), and below 80°F (26.6°C) (AVMA 2008a). A thermometer should be placed in the animal area of the vehicle at the level of the animals (NFHS 2010).

Animals in transport must be observed periodically and allowed to rest, exercise, and urinate and defecate at least every 4–6 hours.

Fresh air free of vehicle exhaust fumes must also be ensured (CDA 2009). The vehicle, including the cargo space, should be heated and cooled when necessary to provide for normal thermoregulation (CDA 2009). Placing unconfined or tethered animals in the back of an open pickup truck for transport is unacceptable and illegal in many jurisdictions. Particular attention must be paid to provision of shade, as a vehicle parked in full sun, even in comfortable temperatures, can rapidly exceed safe temperature levels.

Transporter Responsibilities

The vehicle driver or animal attendant must have sufficient training in animal health, welfare and safety issues to recognize and respond to animal needs during transport. Although no federal regulations exist to limit the distance of travel for companion animals, risk to animal health and welfare increase with the length of the journey. For example, the Federal 28 Hour Law requires that, for every 28 hours of interstate travel, all livestock be provided at least 5 hours of rest during which they must be off-loaded and given food and water (US Code Title 49 Chapter 805).

All dogs and cats must be observed and allowed to rest every 4–6 hours (NFHS 2010). In addition, adult dogs must be allowed to exercise and eliminate every 4–6 hours. The AWA requires the driver or animal attendant to observe dogs and cats as often as circumstances allow, but not less than once every 4 hours (USDA/APHIS Section 3.90 Care in transit). Maximum transport time to an intermediate or final destination shelter should be no more than 12 hours (NFHS 2010). Animals should

not be left unattended when it may be detrimental to their health and safety.

Food must be provided at least every 24 hours for adults and more frequently for animals under 6 months old. Caregivers are charged with providing for the individual nutritional needs of the animals. Because of increased physical stresses, requirements for food and water may be increased during transport, compared to normal nutritional needs. If water is not available at all times it must be provided at frequent (at least every 4 hours) observation stops.

Animal enclosures must be cleaned and any litter replaced as often as necessary to prevent soiling of the animals (e.g., vomit, urine or feces). If it becomes necessary to remove the animals in order to clean, safeguards must be in place to ensure animal safety and prevent escape.

d) Responsibilities at Destination

Points of destination must have enough trained personnel ready to receive and evaluate animals upon arrival at the destination facility. Each animal should receive a documented physical examination at the time of arrival. Veterinary care should be available on arrival for any animal requiring care. The facility must have adequate housing prepared for the arriving animals. The need for isolation or quarantine of arriving animals should be determined based on legal requirements, their health status, source, and infectious disease risk, with due attention to incubation periods for pathogens of concern and detrimental effects of increasing length of stay in the shelter.

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