



**CODE 3**

**A S S O C I A T E S**

## **Facility and Operations Assessment Report**

**for**

**Washoe County Regional Animal Services**

A complete facility and operations assessment was done by Code 3 Associates staff October 16-22, 2015 at the request of the Washoe County Regional Animal Services (WCRAS). The building houses both WCRAS and the Nevada Humane Society (NHS), although their operations are separate. This assessment does not include evaluation of the NHS.

### Overall Facility Observations, External Public Areas

When approaching the building, signage off Longley Road is small and does not stand out. Signage on the building directing visitors and identifying WCRAS from NHS is also small, and unclear. The building is clean and in good repair. The grounds in the front of the building are well maintained. The parking lot is clearly marked and has ample spaces for visitors. Employee parking is behind the building, not visible to visitors, and is a secured area that requires an access card for entry. There is a main entrance as well as a smaller entrance to the left for people who are dropping off stray animals, and a night drop for animals that are turned in after hours.

### Comments:

If unfamiliar with the area, the main sign off Longley Road is easily missed as both the lettering and the sign itself are too small. The signage on the building is also too small, and is confusing as to where one should go for what service or organization they are looking for. The building and grounds are aesthetically pleasing and professional. Having a secure place for employees to park is an added benefit, greatly reducing the safety risks and liability concerns as employees come and go, especially during non-business hours. The main entrance is easily identified, one has to look a little harder for the stray animal entrance and night drop.

### Recommendations:

Replace the sign off Longley Road with a larger, more conspicuous sign that motorists cannot miss. Replace/update the signage on the building to give visitors clear direction as to what service and organization is where (this could include stand-alone sign(s) – they do not have to be on the building).

### Overall Facility Observations, Internal Public Areas

When entering the main lobby, the building interior is clean, does not have any foul odor, and is in good repair. The lobby signage does direct visitors to either WCRAS or NHS. There are monitors on the wall that display current pictures of the animals housed within WCRAS, as well as lost pet binders to assist people looking for their pet. The front counter is to the left as you enter and easily recognizable. The public intake area for strays (people surrendering owned animals are referred to

NHS), through the separate outside entrance, is behind the front counter and at times was staffed by the same person working the front counter. The offices for field operations are across from the front counter, and the main doors to the kennel areas are just past that. The kennel doors were unlocked prior to business hours throughout the period of our assessment. Some of the restricted kennel areas had unsecure doors periodically, and there were some directionally locked interior doors during business hours.

#### Comments:

The loop of pictures on the monitors is a great tool in assisting people finding their pets. The front counter is open and welcoming, as long as there is staff there that sees or acknowledges everyone that comes through the door. If the same person is staffing both public intake and the front, it is impossible to efficiently serve people in both areas at the same time. This creates not only a customer service issue, but also a safety issue. It is easy for someone to slip by that person if they are helping another visitor, or just dump an animal in intake and leave. If there are restricted access doors that are unlocked during business hours, that increases liability as visitors can gain access to places staff does not expect them to be, and where they should not be. Any unlocked doors during non-business hours that can be accessed by a visitor is even more of a liability, as the facility is not prepared for visitors and thus floors are wet, staffing is less, hoses are out, etc., not to mention the safety of the staff. The directional locking doors are a concern as they could impede any evacuation in the case of an emergency.

#### Recommendations:

Install a camera system for the lobby, front counter, and public intake with monitors at the front counter and public intake so staff working in one area can see the other, decreasing the opportunity for visitors to slip past unnoticed, or get upset and/or leave because they were not acknowledged. Increase staffing so there is not one person staffing both areas that visitors come in to the facility. Re-evaluate which doors are locked, when, and why. Then ensure staff locks doors as specified. Request a visit from the Fire Marshal to evaluate the directional locking doors, as well as number and placement of fire extinguishers throughout the building. Additional conspicuous signage may be needed for directing staff and visitors in an emergency, and to identify fire extinguisher locations. Periodic fire and evacuation drills should be conducted, as well as practicing designated procedures in the case of animals needing to be evacuated. Emergency routes should be conspicuously posted as well.

#### Public Area Kennel Observations

The kennels accessible to the public during business hours are divided into several sections/rooms off the main hallway, and each room accessible through an unlocked door. The rooms have dog runs on each side, each run has a guillotine partition to further divide the run, and each run provided the animal a space to get off of the floor. The runs are separated from the visitors by wall and glass, and there is a locked door to give staff access as needed into each side of the room. A few of these doors leading to the animals were unlocked. These kennels were clean during business hours. There are also cat rooms towards the end of the main hallway, and visitors could see the animal housed there from the main hallway. The cat rooms were also clean during business hours.

#### Comments:

Staff seems diligent in making sure the kennels and cages are clean, as well as keeping public areas as hazard free as possible. Unlocked doors provide un-escorted access to the kennels and provide opportunity for injury, litigation, and potential maliciously intended action against the animals.

Recommendations:

Take steps to ensure doors that are to remain locked, do.

Restricted Indoor Areas Observations

Directly off public intake is a room designated as the chipping room. Stray animals that are brought in pass through this room on their way to being examined and processed. There is a table in the center of the room. There are no temporary holding cages. From there, the animal is taken via a narrow hallway past numerous locked rooms (some isolation, some janitorial, some kennels, etc.) to the examination room. All animals are examined by the licensed veterinary technician (LVT) as part of their processing, before being placed in a kennel/cat room. There is a check list regarding processing posted on the wall. Every animal observed being processed was scanned for a microchip. The exam room is connected to a room with holding cages for the officers to utilize when unloading their vehicles in the sally port. The holding cages open from both the sally port and room sides. Across and down from the exam room are more small locked rooms housing animals with varying needs (medical, cruelty investigations, holds, quarantine, etc.). After the sally port are storage and chemical storage areas, including an automated dispensing system for cleaning. Continuing down the hall are a couple offices and officer equipment rooms, freezer area for deceased animals, the back side of the field operations offices, access to the employee parking area, and ending with doors accessing NHS. All of the restricted indoor areas were clean and appropriate doors were locked.

Comments:

The procedure for receiving stray animals appears time consuming and disruptive. When an animal comes in the staff at the public intake counter has to call for assistance immediately because there is no place to safely secure the animal – the chipping room has no capacity for holding animals until they can be processed, it has to be done right then. If more than one animal comes in at a time, this problem is expounded. Staff has to come from the back of the facility to get the animal(s) and then take them back to the exam room. To add to the mix, the same hallway is used for those animals who have been reclaimed to leave the facility which could easily cause issues between animals, and creates opportunity for injury to both animal and human. The animal exams were very thorough and efficiently done. What happens to animals that come in when the LVT is off? The automated dispensing system takes the guesswork out of cleaning solutions, and ensures the right amounts are used each and every time. The numerous separate kennel rooms are helpful for isolation, quarantines, and biohazard concerns. Cage/kennel size appeared to be appropriate for the animals being housed. There were several kennels that had rusty latches, and many of them were hard to open – this is unsafe and inefficient, and creates opportunity for injury of animals and humans. Written protocols/procedures are needed, and are addressed later in this report.

Recommendations:

Install temporary holding cages/kennels in the chipping room so that the public intake staff can secure the animal and then safely take care of the customer, then notify kennel staff of the new arrival(s). Re-evaluate having that narrow hallway used for both incoming and outgoing animals – re-

route outgoing if possible. Hire an additional LVT for coverage when the current LVT is off so that all animals are processed the same. Inspect all latches and hinges on cages / kennels and replace or fix as appropriate. Work routine inspections of such items into written protocols.

### Veterinary Observations

The AVMA (American Veterinary Medicine Association) has sixteen guidelines regarding the development and operation of veterinary facilities and initial animal care. WCRAS was assessed in this area on those guidelines.

1. Overall cleanliness and neatness of personnel and facilities.
  - A. The facilities are clean and neat, the appropriate chemicals are used, well labeled and stored.
  - B. The personnel are neat and professional.
2. Adequate protection against dissemination of disease.
  - A. There are separate wards for holding animals suspected of having infectious diseases
  - B. There are hand sanitizing stations available.
  - C. The cage cleaning protocol in the treatment wards appears adequate.
  - D. The head staff is excellent in her memory of animal treatment protocols and which individuals are to be treated but written protocols and master treatment sheets for each ward, as well as cage signalment, are needed.
3. Proper disposal of all waste material.
  - A. This appears to meet state guidelines.
4. Access to adequate equipment for generation of quality diagnostic images. Provide proper procedures and equipment to protect staff members from radiation exposure.
  - A. A fully qualified and equipped veterinary clinic is available and does not seem to be fully utilized.
5. Adequate ventilation and freedom from noxious odors.
  - A. This does not appear to be an issue in this facility.
6. Freedom from noise pollution.
  - A. The individual wards can become noisy but it can be remediated by rearrangement of animals.
  - B. Overall the facility is not overly noisy.
7. Adequate restraint facilities that are humane in providing proper care to patients during all aspects of their visit.
  - A. There are proper control methods available.
  - B. When trainees are there it is very important that they not be allowed to handle unknown animals alone at any time.
8. Availability of proper refrigeration and sterilization equipment.
  - A. The veterinary clinic is fully accredited by the State of Nevada.
9. Facilities and equipment provided and properly maintained that are suitable for currently acceptable veterinary practice.
  - A. The veterinary clinic is fully accredited by the State of Nevada.
10. Adequate and complete patient, personnel and financial records.
  - A. The computer records are complete for animal intakes.

- B. Matching animals and their meds seem to occasionally be an issue, which can be fixed by written medicine sheets for each ward and animal.
11. Adequate personnel to provide proper veterinary care.
    - A. Hiring a full time Veterinarian, rather than part time, would be a better use of the facility and would ensure rapid, quality care for all animals that are in the custody of WCRAS.
  12. Appropriate facilities and records for the proper storage and dispensing of drugs and supplies in compliance with federal and state laws.
    - A. The controlled substance cabinets and notebooks seem adequate for all DEA requirements.
    - B. The drug and equipment inventory practices are excellent.
  13. Proper equipment for anesthesia management and monitoring of patients under anesthesia.
    - A. Anesthesia equipment appears adequate and well maintained.
    - B. Monitoring was not witnessed.
  14. Provide laboratory services to assist with accurate diagnosis.
    - A. In-house services are adequate.
  15. Provide surgery in an aseptic environment with appropriate pre- and post-operative considerations.
    - A. The excellent facilities appear to be underutilized.
  16. Provide a safe and healthy environment for clients, patients and staff that are in compliance with governmental jurisdictional entities such as but not limited to FDA, USDA, OSHA and EPA.
    - A. The comments made above should not be taken as a condemnation of the facility but rather a way to provide even better service and better utilization of the facilities. When you have a well-trained and diligent staff as you do now it is easy to rely on them totally and written protocols and medicine sheets and ward sheets are often felt to be not needed. However this makes it difficult to provide continuation of care when those people are absent or when animals are accidentally mistaken or moved.

#### Restricted Outdoor Areas Observations

The employee parking lot was clean and well maintained. The parking lot for the animal control vehicles and emergency response units was clean and well maintained. The outside area around the barn was clear and maintained. The inside of the barn appeared to have become the storage site for clutter, including a squeeze chute, resulting in a portion on the aisle being blocked. There is a small exercise area for those housed in the barn.

#### Comments:

The clutter in the barn is unsafe for both staff and animals in their care. Having part of the aisle blocked impedes moving animals to the exercise area safely. Staff walk horses in the parking lot, and although fenced, an asphalt surface is not a safe place to walk a horse. They can slip and lose traction causing them to fall and likely injure themselves, especially if they spook (which they easily can do). If shod, the risk is even greater. The exercise area is a little small, especially so the longer the animal is housed at the facility.

#### Recommendations:

Remove contents in the barn that do not belong there, and do not allow storage of items unrelated to the barn in the barn. Move the squeeze chute to an area in which it could be used if needed. Create a safer path to and from the exercise area for the horses. Explore avenues in which to increase the space for livestock housed at the facility to get exercise.

### Kennel Staff Observations

Overall, the kennel staff were friendly in their interactions with visitors and staff. We did not see any inappropriate handling of or interaction with the animals. Overall, it appeared staff went about their duties with calm confidence. Owners reclaiming their animals were encouraged to have the animal microchipped at no cost, and were informed they are required to buy a county license for dogs (cats are exempt). If owners could not provide proof of rabies vaccination they were issued a notice to do so, and fined if unable to.

### Comments:

The kennel staff expressed a desire for more formalized training and opportunities for cross training with office and field staff. There are no detailed training guidelines for kennel staff, although they do receive limited training by other staff members. What limited animal handling skills we saw from the kennel staff appeared adequate. Written protocols/procedures and training guidelines are needed, and are addressed later in this report.

### Recommendations:

Provide a variety of training options and opportunities more frequently. There are several basic sheltering training courses available, ACT for Shelters ([shelter.4act.com](http://shelter.4act.com)) has a good basic course that covers all aspects of shelter duties that would be beneficial. Include training for care and maintenance of livestock, as well as any non-traditional animals that may be housed at the facility. Refresher training on breed identification, understanding animal body language (and how the animal views yours), animal handling and use of common equipment (catch pole, leashes, carriers, gloves, nets, etc.) would also be beneficial. Consider offering a rabies vaccine if the animal is not current when being reclaimed.

### Field Operations Staff Observations

Overall, the animal control officers exhibited good interpersonal skills with the public. Several of the officers exhibited their animal handling skills both at the facility and out in the field. Stray animals picked up in the field were consistently scanned for a microchip by the officers in the field. Some officers disinfected the vehicle cages after each unload, and others did not. WCRAS serves a community with a high Hispanic population which several times resulted in difficult communication between the officer and the citizen. Animal Services Assistant members may be used for injured animal transport, confined stray pickups, delivering violation notices to citizens, in addition to other technical responses as needed. Field operations is divided into two components, primary Animal Control Officers and Animal Services Assistant.

### Animal Response Teams (ART):

ART is comprised of full time field personnel and volunteers. The volunteers are brought in for special events, and the full time staff serve as “floaters” that can cover both kennel and field assignments. ART trains with the field officers in preparation for a technical response.

Comments:

It appears that there is a generally positive attitude and good morale with field operations staff, as well as support for the administration. At times officers (both seasoned and newer) appeared tentative in approaching and handling an animal, seemingly lacking knowledge in reading the animal’s body language and unsure of how to proceed. Vehicle cages should be cleaned and disinfected after every animal transport, whether it looks dirty or not, without exception. With the number of Hispanic residents, more attention to bilingual communication would assist relations and efficiency from both the field staff’s and the public’s point of view. Written protocols/procedures are needed, and are addressed later in this report.

Recommendations:

Provide opportunities for officers to refresh and refocus their knowledge and skillset in reading animal body language and animal handling. Provide opportunities to learn effective Spanish, explore the use of translator applications on phones and possibly make them a requirement, and expand written information to include Spanish translation.

Dispatch Observations

Dispatch is housed in a room within the offices of the field operations. It is large enough for two persons to work comfortably and secluded from the happenings in the adjacent offices. Some calls are not generated in the system for different reasons (situation handled over the phone, time lapse from incident to call regarding a stray animal, response time in relation to time lapse from a reported stray, caller not having enough information at time of call, etc.). Dispatch duties are covered by field supervisory staff, although there are apparently plans to hire civilians to cover the majority of the dispatch duties. When calls came into dispatch, how they were handled in regard to prioritizing and entering into the system varied depending upon who was taking the call. There is a GPS tracking system that shows the location of each officer’s vehicle as well as identified if the vehicle was stationary for a predetermined amount of time. Dispatch does not perform status checks on officers in the field, and officers do not arrive at or clear calls with dispatch over the radio. Apparently this is under review, with a revision that officer’s arrive and clear calls by radio as well as on the computer.

Comments:

There are discrepancies in how and when calls are entered into the system, which will affect any statistical data gathered for analysis purposes as well as public relations as citizens receive different answers/outcomes depending on which staff member answers the phone. Having field supervisors handle the dispatch duties hampers their ability to effectively supervise their officers and assist with calls. There is an inherent safety issue when officers do not use the radio to arrive and clear a location. Broadcasting that information over the air ensures dispatch realizes the officer is on site and also enables fellow officers to hear the same, increasing awareness should something go wrong and allowing other officers to alert that officer to pertinent information if necessary. Written protocols/procedures are needed, and are addressed later in this report.

#### Recommendations:

Create a hard copy manual for handling calls so that no matter who is working dispatch the call will be handled the same on the dispatch end. Follow through with plans to hire persons specifically for dispatch. Follow through with plans to revise how officers arrive and clear calls, and enact policy for dispatch to contact officers who have been silent and vehicles stationary for over a set period of time for a status check via the radio.

#### Field Response Equipment Observations

WCRAS has a fleet of 15 animal control trucks, 2 flatbeds, 1 pickup, 1 mobile command center, 2 18 foot stock trailers, 1 20 foot cargo trailer for an emergency shelter, 1 20 foot cargo trailer for the Animal Response Team, and 1 12 foot trailer for the Outreach Program. They are on a regular maintenance schedule and look well kept. Each animal control vehicle is equipped with a shotgun as well as the appropriate equipment needed for the officer to do their job effectively. WCRAS utilizes the animal care software Chameleon, and each animal control vehicle is equipped with a computer to facilitate that system. All the equipment we saw looked to be in good working order.

#### Comments:

The equipment is in good working order and appropriate for the duties performed by WCRAS staff.

#### Recommendations:

None.

#### Field Staff Training

Officers receive 6-8 weeks of field training when first hired, and attend nationally recognized training to obtain certification as an Animal Control Officer and as an Animal Cruelty Investigator as available. They also receive firearms training for the use of the shotgun, chemical immobilization training, self-defense training and annual self-defense advanced (which incorporates the expandable baton) training. Officers on the ART team receive training on technical animal rescue. Volunteers on the ART team are required to participate in 8 hours of training and 8 hours of working in the shelter per year.

#### Comments:

The field training program is appropriate and covers the necessary aspects of the job, adequately preparing the new officer for their job. The additional training reinforces the initial training, provides valuable certifications recognized by the courts, and mitigates liability. The shotgun firearms training is done by certified in-house instructors, which could be a liability risk as there is no independent review or oversight. Firearms, chemical immobilization, OC spray, and expandable baton training should be done annually. Volunteers on the ART team do not put in enough hours to keep their skill level adequate if they were needed in an emergency. Written protocols/procedures are needed, and are addressed later in this report.

#### Recommendations:

Continue to provide quality training to officers and implement annual training for firearms and chemical immobilization. Expand volunteer ART training to a quarterly schedule for both skill test and



practical exercise, and expand the animal interaction hours required to ensure the volunteers feel comfortable dealing with animals in stressful situations. Implement personal protective equipment policies. Consult with Washoe County Human Resources and Council on whether personal liability insurance is needed for ART volunteers or if the county assumes all responsibility when the team trains or responds.

### Training in General

Proper training is a useful tool. It lets new staff know how the organization wants things done, and re-emphasizes the same to tenured staff. Field staff, veterinary medicine staff, and kennel staff should be trained on how to do the job and about the hazards of that job before they begin work. Refresher training should be conducted at regular intervals as required or as needed. Training should include information about the following:

- Potential workplace hazards, both biological and physical
- Safe handling, restraint, and care of small animals
- Safe handling, restraint, and care of large animals
- Safe handling, restraint, and care of non-traditional animals
- Emergency and evacuation procedures from the building or specified areas (ex: fire, loose biting dog, potential rabid cat, bleach spill)
- Proper care and use of PPE
- Prompt reporting of all work-related injuries and illnesses
- Effective use of controls for reducing workplace exposures and injuries
- Veterinary standard precautions including infection control practices
- Preventing needle stick, scalpel, and sharps injury
- Occupational risks for pregnant and immunocompromised workers

### Outreach

This is a newly formed department within WCRAS designed to oversee the volunteer programs and engage other community organizations with interest in animal welfare and citizen needs for their pets. There is not a formal strategic plan developed yet for this department.

Comments:

None, new department.

Recommendations:

In implementing the community outreach program, determine the top 2-4 programs that benefit the community and WCRAS and focus on those before trying to tackle all of the ideas at once. Of the 2-4, one of them needs to be a volunteer program so that it can support the other programs as they develop.

### NHS

There was no opportunity to witness direct contact between WCRAS and NHS. NHS has the right to first selection of adoptable animals from WCRAS, yet it appears there is little dialog between the two organizations regarding that process. Apparently NHS claims animals at random and do not always advise WCRAS kennel staff when taking them over to the NHS side of the building.

#### Comments:

There is an obvious disconnect between WCRAS and NHS that prevents cohesion and teamwork to achieve what is best for the animals. The lack of dialog over selecting animals creates an issue for other placement partner organizations to receive potentially adoptable animals. Having animals removed at random and without notification is not only discourteous, but can cause stress on the part of the staff as well as opportunity for error, not to mention time consuming wild goose chases. Written protocols/procedures are needed, and are addressed later in this report.

#### Recommendations:

Re-evaluate the first selection process and procedures for NHS to remove animals. Encourage open communication and cohesion between the two organizations, on the part of administration and staff alike. Re-key doors/locks so NHS staff cannot access dogs without WCRAS staff knowledge, if no other solution can be effective.

#### Written Protocols/Procedures – Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)

The lack of detailed SOP's throughout WCRAS opens the facility and Washoe County up for litigation from both citizens and employees. It also decreases safety and efficiency, as staff interprets perceived policies differently. It can adversely affect morale, as staff can become frustrated when what they perceive as wrong goes uncorrected, potentially causing feelings of a double standard. The number of staff, both in kennels and field operations, that knew the existence of, contents of, had read or been given some type of policy manual varied greatly.

#### Recommendations:

Every area of WCRAS needs to have written SOP's, and each employee needs to have their own copy and sign for both receipt of the manual and that they have read the contents and understand it. Hand in hand with that is ensuring that staff has been trained to do their jobs as detailed in the manual. Review current policies and if appropriate, merge them into the complete SOP manual once finalized.

#### Final Thoughts

WCRAS has an excellent overall facility. There are a handful of flow issues that would improve safety and efficiency once rectified (such as the narrow hallway for incoming and outgoing traffic, and the walking of horses on the asphalt). The staff is overall pleasant and professional, seem to enjoy what they do and are engaged. Possibly the biggest issue is the lack of a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure manual, and once completed and finalized, the training of all staff according to what is in that manual. All current policies and procedures should be reviewed, revised, and inserted into that manual. Revamping dispatch (having dedicated dispatchers versus using field supervisors) and revising some of the radio/computer procedures would be of high importance as well, especially from an officer safety standpoint. Implementing a formalized training program for kennel staff would give those staff members something to strive for as well as continue to keep them engaged. Providing continued training for all staff, regardless of position, and providing opportunities to voice their ideas reflects the administration's desire for a safe and cohesive workplace, which promotes employees to take pride and a little ownership in what they do.

Please contact us if you have any questions or need more information in any area of the assessment.

