

Chapter 46
Animal Welfare Act

Part 1
General Provisions

11-46-101 Title.

This chapter is known as the "Animal Welfare Act."

Enacted by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-102 Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

- (1)
 - (a) "Animal" means a cat or dog.
 - (b) "Animal" does not include livestock, as that term is defined in Section 4-1-109.
- (2) "Animal control officer" means any person employed or appointed by a county or a municipality who is authorized to investigate violations of laws and ordinances concerning animals, to issue citations in accordance with Utah law, and to take custody of animals as appropriate in the enforcement of laws and ordinances concerning animals.
- (3)
 - (a) "Animal shelter" means a facility or program that provides services for stray, lost, or unwanted animals, including holding and placing the animals for adoption.
 - (b) "Animal shelter" includes a private humane society or private animal welfare organization.
 - (c) "Animal shelter" does not include an institution, as that term is defined in Section 26B-1-236, that is conducting research on animals.
- (4) "Person" means an individual, an entity, or a representative of an entity.

Amended by Chapter 327, 2023 General Session

Amended by Chapter 360, 2023 General Session

11-46-103 Stray animals -- Impounded animals

- (1) Each municipal or county animal control officer shall hold or cause to be held at an animal shelter any unidentified or unclaimed stray animal, and any other animal taken into custody by the municipal or county animal control officer, in safe and humane custody for a minimum of five business days after the time of impound and prior to making any final disposition of the animal.
- (2) An animal shelter shall ensure that a record of each held animal is maintained that includes the:
 - (a) date of impound;
 - (b) date of disposition; and
 - (c) method of disposition, which may be:
 - (i) placement in an adoptive home or other transfer of the animal, which shall be in accordance with Part 2, Animal Shelter Pet Sterilization Act;
 - (ii) return to the animal's owner;
 - (iii) placement in a community cat program as defined in Section 11-46-302; or
 - (iv) euthanasia in accordance with Part 4, Euthanasia of Shelter Animals.

- (3) An impounded animal may be euthanized before the completion of the five working day minimum holding period to prevent unnecessary suffering due to serious injury or disease if the euthanasia complies with:
 - (a) written agency or department policies and procedures;
 - (b) local ordinances; and
 - (c) Part 4, Euthanasia of Shelter Animals.
- (4) An impounded animal shall be returned to the animal's owner upon:
 - (a) the establishment of proof of ownership;
 - (b) compliance with the requirements of applicable local ordinances; and
 - (c) compliance with Part 2, Animal Shelter Pet Sterilization Act.

Amended by Chapter 428, 2024 General Session

11-46-104 County tax for provision of animal welfare services.

- (1) As used in this section:
 - (a) "County" means a county:
 - (i) of the second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth class; and
 - (ii) in which the county is the sole provider of animal welfare services under this part.
 - (b) "Municipality" means a city or a town that receives animal welfare services from the county.
- (2) Subject to Subsections (5) and (6), a legislative body in a county may levy annually a tax not to exceed .0002 of taxable value of taxable property in the county to provide the services described in this chapter.
- (3)
 - (a) Except as provided in Section 17-63-704, the levy described in this section is in addition to other taxes that the county is authorized to levy.
 - (b) The levy described in this section is not subject to the aggregate maximum levy limitation described in Section 59-2-908.
- (4)
 - (a) The county shall levy and collect the tax described in this section in the same manner as other general taxes of the county.
 - (b) The county shall deposit revenue collected from the levy described in this section into a fund known as the county animal welfare fund.
- (5) Before a county that provides animal welfare services on behalf of one or more municipalities may impose a tax under this section for the first time:
 - (a) the county shall notify each municipality of:
 - (i) the total cost to the county for providing animal welfare services; and
 - (ii) the total amount of revenue the county will generate by imposing a levy under this section;
 - (b) the county and the municipalities shall determine the county's and each municipality's percentage share of the county's cost for providing animal welfare services; and
 - (c) the county shall notify the State Tax Commission of:
 - (i) the names of the municipalities;
 - (ii) the revenue calculated by multiplying the county's percentage share of the cost for providing animal welfare services by the total amount of revenue the county will generate by imposing a levy under this section; and
 - (iii) for each municipality described in Subsection (5)(c)(i), the revenue calculated by multiplying the municipality's percentage share of the cost for providing animal welfare services by the total amount of revenue the county will generate by imposing a levy under this section.

- (6) A county, as a condition of providing animal welfare services, may not prohibit a municipality from imposing a local animal control ordinance within the municipality that is different than a county animal control ordinance.

Amended by Chapter 16, 2025 Special Session 1

Part 2

Animal Shelter Pet Sterilization Act

11-46-201 Title.

This part is known as the "Animal Shelter Pet Sterilization Act."

Enacted by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-202 Definitions.

In addition to the definitions in Section 11-46-102, as used in this part:

- (1) "Proof of sterilization" means a written document signed by a veterinarian licensed under Title 58, Chapter 28, Veterinary Practice Act, stating:
 - (a) a specified animal has been sterilized;
 - (b) the date on which the sterilization was performed; and
 - (c) the location where the sterilization was performed.
- (2) "Recipient" means the person to whom an animal shelter transfers an animal for adoption.
- (3) "Sterilization deposit" means the portion of a fee charged by an animal shelter to a recipient or claimant of an unsterilized animal to ensure the animal is timely sterilized in accordance with an agreement between the recipient or the claimant and the animal shelter.
- (4) "Sterilized" means that an animal has been surgically altered either by the spaying of a female animal or by the neutering of a male animal, so it is unable to reproduce.
- (5) "Transfer" means that an animal shelter sells, gives away, places for adoption, or transfers an animal to a recipient.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-203 Animal shelters to transfer only sterilized animals, or shall require sterilization deposit.

- (1) An animal shelter may not transfer an animal that has not been sterilized, except as provided in Subsection (2) or Section 11-46-206.
- (2) An animal shelter may transfer an animal for adoption that has not been sterilized only if the animal shelter:
 - (a) establishes a written agreement, executed by the recipient, stating the animal is not sterilized and the recipient agrees in writing to be responsible for ensuring the animal is sterilized:
 - (i) within 30 days after the agreement is signed, if the animal is six months of age or older; or
 - (ii) if the animal is younger than six months of age, within 30 days after the animal becomes six months of age; and
 - (b) receives from the recipient a sterilization deposit as provided under Section 11-46-204, the terms of which are part of the written agreement executed by the recipient in accordance with this section.

- (3) The shelter may waive the sterilization deposit and release any unsterilized animal to a sponsor, as defined in Section 11-46-302, provided the sponsor is a non-profit organization that qualifies as being tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and provides proof of sterilization within 30 days.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-204 Sterilization deposit.

- (1) A sterilization deposit may be:
 - (a) a portion of the adoption fee or purchase price of the animal, which will enable the adopter to take the animal for sterilization to a veterinarian with whom the animal shelter has an agreement that the veterinarian will bill the animal shelter directly for the sterilization;
 - (b) a deposit that is:
 - (i) refundable to the recipient if proof of sterilization of the animal within the appropriate time limits under Section 11-46-203 is presented to the animal shelter not more than three months after the date the animal is sterilized; and
 - (ii) forfeited to the animal shelter if proof of sterilization is not presented to the animal shelter in compliance with Subsection (1)(b)(i); or
 - (c) a deposit under Section 11-46-206 required for an owner to claim an unsterilized animal impounded at the animal shelter.
- (2) Sterilization deposits under Subsection (1) shall reflect the average reduced cost of a sterilization of an animal, based on the gender and weight of the animal, that is reasonably available in the area where the animal shelter is located, but the deposit may not be less than \$25.
- (3) If a female animal and her litter are transferred to one person, a sterilization deposit is required only for the female animal.
- (4) All sterilization deposits forfeited or unclaimed under this section shall be retained by the animal shelter and used by the animal shelter only for:
 - (a) a program to sterilize animals, which may include a sliding scale fee program;
 - (b) a public education program to reduce and prevent overpopulation of animals and the related costs to local governments;
 - (c) a follow-up program to assure that animals transferred by the animal shelter are sterilized in accordance with the agreement executed under Section 11-46-203; and
 - (d) any additional costs incurred by the animal shelter in the administration of the requirements of this chapter.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-205 Failure to comply with sterilization agreement.

If a recipient fails to comply with the sterilization agreement under Subsection 11-46-203(2):

- (1) the failure is ground for seizure and impoundment of the animal by the animal shelter from whom the recipient obtained the animal;
- (2) the recipient relinquishes all ownership rights regarding the animal and any claim to expenses incurred in maintenance and care of the animal; and
- (3) the recipient forfeits the sterilization deposit.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-206 Sterilization deposit -- When required for redemption by owner of impounded animal.

- (1) Upon the second impound within a 12-month period and upon any subsequent impound of an animal that is claimed by its owner, an animal shelter may release the impounded animal to its owner only upon payment of all impound fees required by the shelter and:
 - (a) receipt of proof the animal has been sterilized; or
 - (b) a sterilization deposit.
- (2) The sterilization deposit shall be refunded to the owner only if the owner provides proof of sterilization to the animal shelter within 30 days of release of the animal to the owner.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-207 Penalties.

- (1)
 - (a) A person who knowingly commits any of the violations in Subsection (2) is subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$250 on a first violation, and a civil penalty of not less than \$500 on any second or subsequent violation.
 - (b) The administrator of the animal shelter imposes the civil penalties under this section.
- (2) A person is subject to the civil penalties under Subsection (1) who:
 - (a) falsifies any proof of sterilization submitted for the purpose of compliance with this part;
 - (b) provides to an animal shelter or a licensed veterinarian inaccurate information regarding ownership of any animal required to be submitted for sterilization under this part;
 - (c) submits to an animal shelter false information regarding sterilization fees or fee schedules; or
 - (d) issues a check for insufficient funds for any sterilization deposit required of the person under this part.
- (3) A person who contests a civil penalty imposed under this section is entitled to an administrative hearing that provides for the person's rights of due process.
- (4) All penalties collected under this section shall be retained by the animal shelter imposing the penalties, to be used solely for the purposes of Subsection 11-46-204(4).

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-208 Local ordinances may be no less restrictive.

Local ordinances or the adoption or placement procedures of any animal shelter shall be at least as restrictive as the provisions of this part.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

**Part 3
Community Cat Act**

11-46-301 Title.

This part is known as the "Community Cat Act."

Enacted by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

11-46-302 Definitions.

In addition to the definitions in Sections 11-46-102 and 11-46-202, as used in this part:

- (1) "Community cat" means a feral or free-roaming cat that is without visibly discernable or microchip owner identification of any kind, and has been sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped.
- (2) "Community cat caretaker" means any person other than an owner who provides food, water, or shelter to a community cat or community cat colony.
- (3) "Community cat colony" means a group of cats that congregate together. Although not every cat in a colony may be a community cat, any cats owned by individuals that congregate with a colony are considered part of it.
- (4) "Community cat program" means a program pursuant to which feral cats are sterilized, vaccinated against rabies, ear-tipped, and returned to the location where they congregate.
- (5) "Ear-tipping" means removing approximately a quarter-inch off the tip of a cat's left ear while the cat is anesthetized for sterilization.
- (6) "Feral" has the same meaning as in Section 23A-1-101.
- (7) "Sponsor" means any person or organization that traps feral cats, sterilizes, vaccinates against rabies, and ear-tips them before returning them to the location where they were trapped. A sponsor may be any animal humane society, non-profit organization, animal rescue, adoption organization, or a designated community cat caretaker that also maintains written records on community cats.

Amended by Chapter 34, 2023 General Session

11-46-303 Community cats.

- (1) A cat received by a shelter under the provisions of Section 11-46-103 may be released prior to the five-day holding period to a sponsor that operates a community cat program.
- (2) A community cat is:
 - (a) exempt from licensing requirements and feeding bans; and
 - (b) eligible for release from an animal shelter prior to the mandatory five-day hold period in Section 11-46-103.
- (3) Community cat sponsors or caretakers do not have custody, as defined in Section 76-13-202, of any cat in a community cat colony. Cats in a colony that are obviously owned, as evidenced by a collar, tags, microchip, or other discernable owner identification, are not exempt from the provisions of Title 76, Chapter 13, Offenses Involving Cruelty to Animals.
- (4) Sterilization and vaccination records shall be maintained for a minimum of three years and be available to an animal control officer upon request.

Amended by Chapter 173, 2025 General Session

11-46-304 Permit process for community cat colonies.

- (1) A county or municipality may create a permitting process for community cat colonies.
- (2) Any permitting process created by a county or municipality shall provide notice to adjacent property owners by:
 - (a) mailing notice to the record owner of each parcel within parameters specified by the permitting process; or
 - (b) posting notice on the property with a sign of sufficient size, durability, print quality, and location that is reasonably calculated to give notice to passers-by.

Enacted by Chapter 130, 2011 General Session

Part 4 Euthanasia of Shelter Animals

11-46-401 Euthanasia of shelter animals -- Permitted methods.

- (1) Subject to Subsection (2), and except as provided in Subsection (3), on or after October 1, 2023, an animal shelter may euthanize an animal only by administering a drug that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved for the euthanasia of an animal, as that term is defined in this chapter.
- (2) An animal shelter may euthanize an animal only by:
 - (a) intravenous injection by hypodermic needle;
 - (b) intraperitoneal injection by hypodermic needle; or
 - (c) if an animal is unconscious, intracardial injection by hypodermic needle.
- (3)
 - (a) Subsection (1) does not apply to an animal control officer who, subject to Subsection (3)(b), euthanizes an animal in an emergency situation outside of an animal shelter's facility or place of business.
 - (b) If an animal control officer euthanizes an animal in an emergency situation, the officer shall use, in the officer's judgment, the most humane method available to the officer.

Enacted by Chapter 360, 2023 General Session

11-46-402 Animal shelter euthanasia training -- Documentation.

- (1) If an animal shelter performs euthanasia on animals, the animal shelter shall:
 - (a) adopt a policy for euthanasia that mandates procedures that comply with the applicable provisions of this part;
 - (b) adopt a euthanasia training program; and
 - (c) require each person who conducts or assists with euthanasia on behalf of the animal shelter to attend a euthanasia training program at least once every two years.
- (2) An animal shelter described in Subsection (1) shall:
 - (a) ensure that the euthanasia training program is taught by a veterinarian who is licensed in accordance with Title 58, Chapter 28, Veterinary Practice Act; and
 - (b) maintain a record of training dates and who attended.

Enacted by Chapter 360, 2023 General Session

11-46-403 Disposition of animals in an animal shelter.

- (1) As used in this section:
 - (a) "Animal organization" includes both an animal rescue group and an animal shelter.
 - (b) "Animal rescue group" includes a private humane society or a private animal welfare organization.
 - (c) "Animal shelter" does not include a private humane society or a private animal welfare organization.
- (2) An animal held by or in the custody of an animal shelter that is not adopted, transferred to another animal shelter or an animal rescue group, placed into a community cat program

as described in Part 3, Community Cat Act, or reclaimed by the animal's owner, may be euthanized:

- (a) if no reasonable alternatives to euthanasia are available; and
 - (b) in accordance with the requirements of this part.
- (3)
- (a) An animal shelter may euthanize an animal:
 - (i) only after:
 - (A) the holding period for the animal required by Section 11-46-103 is expired;
 - (B) notifying animal shelter and animal rescue groups, except as provided in Subsection (5), that have expressed an interest in receiving animals at risk of euthanasia;
 - (C) no animal shelter or animal rescue group requests the transfer of the animal within two business days after the day on which the animal shelter makes the notice described in Subsection (3)(a)(i)(A); and
 - (D) no animal shelter or animal rescue group collects the animal within two business days after the day on which the animal shelter makes the notice described in Subsection (3)(a)(i)(A);
 - (ii) to prevent unnecessary suffering due to serious injury or disease, in accordance with Subsection 11-46-103(3); or
 - (iii) if the animal is a dog that has been determined to be dangerous or vicious under state or local law.
 - (b) The time periods described in Subsections (3)(a)(i)(C) and (D) may run concurrently with:
 - (i) the holding period required by Section 11-46-103; and
 - (ii) any holding period required by an applicable local ordinance.
- (4)
- (a) An animal shelter may provide the notice described in Subsection (3)(a)(i)(B) in accordance with the animal shelter's established internal policies and procedures.
 - (b) An animal organization is responsible for monitoring messages left for the animal organization.
 - (c) If an animal organization maintains an electronic or other digital forum in which an animal shelter may post notices about animals available for placement, the animal organization that maintains the forum is responsible for monitoring the forum.
- (5)
- (a) Nothing in Subsection (3)(a)(i) requires an animal shelter to notify or release an animal to an animal rescue group if the animal shelter knows or has reason to believe that:
 - (i) any of the animal rescue group's current directors, officers, or employees have been convicted of a crime related to animal cruelty or neglect;
 - (ii) any of the animal rescue group's current directors, officers, or employees have pending charges related to animal cruelty or neglect; or
 - (iii) the animal rescue group is constrained by court order that prevents the organization from taking in or keeping animals.
 - (b) Subsection (5)(a) does not impose an obligation on an animal shelter to investigate, verify, or monitor:
 - (i) the criminal history or pending criminal charges of or for a director, officer, or employee of an animal rescue group; or
 - (ii) whether an animal rescue group is subject to a court order described in Subsection (5)(a)(iii).

(6) An animal shelter is not liable for an act or omission under this section if the animal shelter acts in good faith based on the information available to the animal shelter at the time of the act or omission.

Enacted by Chapter 430, 2026 General Session