



International



OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE
for dog-control staff

THE RSPCA

Established in 1824, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is the oldest animal welfare organisation in the world. The Society is based in the UK and runs 51 animal centres that together rehome an average of 70,000 abandoned animals every year. We advise local authorities around the world on their programmes to control the number of stray dogs in their communities.



Brian Faulkner

▲ Dog control in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

▼ A local authority animal welfare officer at work in London, UK.



London Borough of Brent

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INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly important for government at all levels to deal with stray dogs in a humane manner. The World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Council of Europe have all recognised the need for government bodies to control dog populations while avoiding the unnecessary suffering of dogs. This report provides guidance for dog-control staff working on government-funded programmes. It is based on our experience of working with animal-control professionals, particularly in Europe and Asia. This guidance is in line with international standards, including the guidelines on stray dog population control adopted by the OIE in May 2009¹.

Why control the dog population?

A stray dog is any dog that is not under the direct supervision of an owner or restrained by any barrier and is therefore free to roam in the community. Stray dogs have the potential to create a number of public health and safety problems, and many citizens have justifiable concerns about:

- the transmission of disease to humans (zoonoses) and other animals
- injuries and fear caused to humans by aggressive behaviour
- nuisance to humans through noise and fouling
- death or injury to livestock, wildlife or other animals
- road traffic accidents.

As a result a large number of countries have a legal requirement for a designated public authority (normally a government body) to control stray-dog populations.

The public health and safety problems associated with stray dogs also have financial implications. Over the past 20 years, a combination of improved stray dog management and the work of animal welfare groups to promote responsible pet ownership has substantially reduced the costs of the stray population to the UK economy.

In 1989 dealing with stray dogs cost the UK economy almost £70 million (€80.9 million) directly and indirectly. Indirect costs consist of the damage caused by dogs such as road traffic accidents,

hospital costs caused by bite incidents and injury to livestock. Direct costs to government involve the capture and impounding of the dogs themselves. By 1998, the overall cost had fallen to £60 million (€69.3 million) annually².

Significantly, the reduced 1998 figure includes an estimated £19 million (€22 million) increase in annual spending on direct government dog-control services, indicating a much larger fall in indirect stray costs³. The £29 million (€33.5 million) reduction in the indirect cost of stray dogs to the UK economy demonstrates the value of long-term investment from government at all levels.

A comprehensive dog-control programme is in the interests of animal welfare as well as public health. Unsupervised dogs often suffer as a result of:

- malnutrition
- disease
- injury through road traffic accidents
- injury through fighting
- abusive treatment at the hands of communities that do not accept them.

Our aims

The aim of this document is to provide advice to staff who collect stray dogs as part of a wider strategy to control the dog population in their community. It covers the core areas of work that these staff normally deal with and provides guidance on how to conduct these tasks humanely and effectively. It focuses on specific areas of work rather than looking at the design of a comprehensive dog population management programme.

It is important to note here that you will not solve a dog-control problem in the long term simply by providing a service that removes dogs from the streets. A successful dog-control programme tackles the root causes that lead to stray dogs being on the streets in the first place. The best programmes encourage responsible pet ownership through education, legislation, and systems of registration and identification. They encourage the neutering of dogs to reduce the reproductive capacity of the dog population and vaccination of dogs to prevent the spread of zoonoses. The role of the municipality extends far beyond catching and kennelling.

The appropriate strategy will depend on a wide range of factors that reflect the needs of your area. You need to identify the size of the dog population (owned and unowned) and the nature of the dog ownership that is present in your community, for example are dogs owned but allowed to wander unsupervised?

1. OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, chapter on the Control of Stray Dog Populations (as agreed on 27 May 2009). The OIE is the intergovernmental organisation tasked with improving animal health worldwide. It is recognised as a reference organisation by the WTO and at the time of going to print had 174 member countries and territories worldwide.
2. Figures taken from London School of Economics, 1989. *The Costs of Stray Dogs and Proposals for a National Dog Registration Scheme*, (ii) and Economists Advisory Group, 1998, *The Cost of Stray Dogs in the United Kingdom and the Need for a National Registration Scheme*, p.33.
3. *Ibid.*

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Detailed guidance on devising a dog-control strategy can be found in the International Companion Animal Management (ICAM) Coalition's publication *Humane dog population management guidance*, which is available to download in a variety of languages from: www.icam-coalition.org/resources.html

Why use humane methods?

The OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) explicitly recognises that “dog ecology is linked with human activity” and that “control of the dog population has to be accompanied by changes to human behaviour in order to be effective”⁴. To encourage owners to act more responsibly toward their pets, there needs to be a relationship of trust between the animal-owning public and a public authority. When public authority staff use cruel methods of capture, transport, kennelling and killing, they alienate the very people whose support is required to control the dog population in the long term. In contrast, if public authority staff use humane methods of capture, transport, kennelling and euthanasia, they provide a good example to the community at large. A community with high levels of responsible pet ownership will usually have a low number of stray dogs on its streets, reducing the day-to-day workload that a public authority is forced to deal with.

At a very basic level, using more humane methods makes a handler's work safer as dogs will be less fearful and less likely to bite. The use of more humane methods also improves working conditions for staff. Animals that are correctly handled are less likely to dirty vehicles with vomit, faeces and urine. In addition, putting proper facilities and procedures in place at a kennel can help animals act more calmly during their stay⁵.

We hope this document provides some direction to help animal-control staff ensure they are acting in a humane and effective manner at all times. It is designed to encourage best practice, but we would emphasise that best practice must be sympathetic to the reality of local knowledge and resources.

We would welcome feedback on any sections that people feel could be improved; contact details can be found at the end of the document.

STAKEHOLDERS

Controlling a population of stray dogs in any given area requires cooperation between many sections of the local community. The use of humane methods will often improve your working relationship with other organisations in the community that have a stake in the success of your stray-control programme. These ‘stakeholders’ include a wide array of governmental, non-governmental and community organisations.

The OIE recommends that the competent authority establishes an advisory group that includes all relevant stakeholders⁶. Their support is required (at the local and national level) if your programme is going to be a success. It is a mistake to ignore the concerns of stakeholders or assume that certain stakeholders, such as animal protection societies, will oppose your programme. Animal protection societies can offer a great deal of assistance, particularly in educating the public and gathering public support. Nonetheless, it is important to consider that different partners will have different priorities, which can lead to conflicting messages. Before entering into a partnership, it would be useful to agree a ‘memorandum of understanding’ (MoU) between leading stakeholders, which all partners sign. This agreement details the aims and principles of cooperation, what each party will be contributing to the programme, and what they should expect in return.



Dawn Peacock

▲ Training in humane dog-catching techniques, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

4. OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, chapter on the Control of Stray Dog Populations (as agreed on 27 May 2009).

5. Instituto Técnico de Educação e Controle Animal (ITEC), 2007. *Training courses for animal officers*, p.14.

6. OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, chapter on the Control of Stray Dog Populations (as agreed on 27 May 2009).

CAPTURE AND HANDLING

The capture and handling of stray dogs is the prime function of municipal dog-catching staff or those organisations carrying out this activity on behalf of the municipality.

It is important that staff are advised about appropriate methods of capture and items of equipment. This advice must be in line with any national or local legislation that regulates these activities. Environmental protection or animal welfare laws often lay down, in greater detail, the legal framework that obliges animal-control staff to seize animals as well as the appropriate methods to use. The OIE stipulates that capture, transport and handling must be conducted humanely and that the competent authority should implement training and legislation to ensure these activities are regulated⁷. As a simple guide, the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Pet Animals stipulates that stray animals must be caught in accordance with basic humane principles⁸.

Personnel

The primary role of a dog-control programme is to catch stray dogs humanely and safely. Quite often this task is carried out in the public arena, so it is vitally important that dog-catching staff have the ability to deal with stray dogs in a safe and humane manner without compromising public and personal safety or the welfare of the animal.

When interviewing candidates for your dog-control programme, you should look for signs of empathy towards dogs. This can be difficult, particularly when staff are delegated to this duty from within the municipal establishment, but it is vital that all staff are confident in their new role. In light of this, it is essential that all staff engaged in dog control are capable of carrying out their duties efficiently and humanely. In order to do this they need:

- appropriate training
- equipment that is fit for purpose
- roles and responsibilities that are clearly defined.

Dog-catching personnel, by the nature of their work, have a high public profile and are often the only visible sign of the municipality's response to a common concern. The catchers' conduct in public can reflect on the municipality in general, so it is important that they act humanely towards the dogs, are courteous towards members of the public, are clearly identifiable and are appropriately dressed in a practical uniform.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The term 'dog catcher' often has negative connotations that can create a public image problem when trying to recruit good staff with empathy for animals. Many local governments around the world have changed the name of their service from the traditional 'dog-catching service' to 'animal welfare service' to properly reflect the more humane approach they are taking. Changing the name of your service at the same time as introducing more humane methods can greatly improve relations with the community.

Catching teams

The number of catching staff you employ and how they are deployed should be determined by the local demographics of both the human and dog populations. It will also depend on whether your programme is reactive (simply responding to complaints) or proactive (with a strategy to reduce the number of dogs in the long term).

To have a proactive catching strategy in a large city, more than one catching team will be needed. One team is required simply to respond to complaints in the city – operating wherever the complaints come from. Additional catching teams can then be used to work the city in a structured manner, as part of a larger strategy. Each team should consist of a minimum of two catching staff.

These additional catching teams should not respond to complaints and should only be deployed at times when it is probable that the dogs in your locality will be most active or more likely to be caught. Unfortunately, municipal workers tend to work within a pre-determined period of time, such as 9am to 4pm, which may not correlate with the hours that the dogs are most active. Stray dogs are often active early in the morning and again late evening, with intermittent periods of activity during the night, whereas owned dogs may be active during the day and return home at night. The size and behaviour of the local dog population will determine the exact number of teams needed and the way they work. This can be established by an initial survey to assess the type of dogs you are dealing with: lost, abandoned, unsupervised or unowned dogs.

7. OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, chapter on the Control of Stray Dog Populations (as agreed on 27 May 2009).

8. Council of Europe 1987, European Convention for the Protection of Animals. Strasbourg, France.

Before deploying additional teams you must decide where best to place them. It is useful to begin by looking at a plan of your city or town and dividing the area into manageable portions. Ideal portion or sector boundaries could be natural features such as rivers, major roads that intersect the city, or definite divisions such as a boundary between a residential area and an industrial area. At this stage it would also be useful to identify areas of priority, high-profile locations, shopping areas, or sites that could be regarded as high risk such as schools. Alternatively, you could focus on areas where large numbers of stray dogs are found, such as high-density housing. The additional teams can then be committed to catching dogs in one particular sector, only moving to a neighbouring sector after the number of stray dogs is significantly reduced. **The majority of municipalities we have worked with set a minimum target figure of 75 per cent stray dog population caught in a particular sector.**

Comment

It is not wise to assume that if you receive a large number of public complaints about dogs from a particular area then that area has a large stray dog population. The dogs may originate from an adjoining area or it could simply be that residents in one particular neighbourhood are less tolerant of dogs than those in another. A thorough survey is essential when assessing your dog population and arriving at your strategy.

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Further information is available on page 7 of the ICAM Coalition's publication *Humane dog population management guidance*. This, and other resources on survey methodology, can be found at: www.icam-coalition.org/resources.html

Catching techniques

Catchers should always opt for the least invasive strategy first, adopting a quiet, calm approach. A simple slip lead and bait is often all that is required to catch socialised dogs that are calm, approachable and used to positive interaction with humans. However, the most appropriate equipment and methods of capture (see right) will depend on local circumstances, such as the behaviour of the dog being targeted (i.e. fearful, elusive or friendly) and the dog's location.

Initially, the catching team should observe targeted dogs from a distance. Once they have assessed the dogs' behaviour and the surrounding area based on specified criteria, they decide what type of equipment to use and the best strategy to adopt. The dog-catching team should take into account that while they are observing the dogs, the dogs will be observing them.

HOW TO APPROACH DOGS

Assess the dog(s) being targeted and choose appropriate tactics and equipment. Always opt for the least invasive method of capture and restraint first. Here are some general points to consider when approaching a dog.

- Remember that any action from catchers will provoke a reaction from the dog(s).
- First assess the location the dog is in. Is it close to potential hazards such as a busy road? Could it be driven slowly towards a more secure area to make capture easier?
- Avoid direct eye contact as it heightens the dog's arousal and could trigger a flight or an aggressive response.
- A catcher should adopt a non-aggressive body posture by presenting a low profile on approach. Their movements should remain calm and slow.
- A catcher should not display gestures that the dog will perceive as threatening, such as exposing any items of equipment that are being carried. Equipment should be kept hidden either behind the catcher's back or low to the side, dependent on the type of equipment being used.
- It may be possible for one team member to attract the dog's attention with bait (food) while another team member moves in a wide arc and approaches the dog from behind.
- Should the dog attempt to take flight, the catcher should stop chasing it immediately as this would make the dog more fearful of future attempts to catch it. If a fearful dog is cornered, it can become aggressive.

Training

It is essential that all dog-catching staff undergo appropriate training in the use of equipment to prevent the unnecessary suffering of an animal and avoid injury to staff. Any item of equipment can injure a dog if used incorrectly.

The RSPCA provides training courses on humane catching and handling and shelter management in specific regions within Europe. For more information contact RSPCA International at: www.rspca.org.uk/international.

Advice on the correct equipment to use may be available from some equipment suppliers or from animal welfare NGOs such as the RSPCA, Humane Society International (HSI), the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) or the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA).

Equipment

Before deciding what equipment to use, it is important to assess the individual dog. Not all equipment is suitable for all dogs. Friendly dogs may be made secure on a simple slip lead whereas a net or grasper may be required when catching and handling more aggressive dogs. The main objective is to catch the dog without injury to the animal or staff while minimising any fear or distress experienced by the dog. These methods will go a long way towards improving the public image of collecting staff and increasing the success of your dog-catching programme.

Listed below, **for reference only**, is a range of equipment commonly used for the capture and control of stray dogs.

It is essential that staff are trained how to handle equipment properly – skills should be developed and practised in a safe environment before being used to catch animals in a public arena. It is also important to be aware of relevant national and local legislation that may restrict the use of certain pieces of equipment on the list.

Leads (leashes)

Simple slip leads are the most suitable piece of equipment for use on friendly, socialised dogs, especially in regions where there is a high percentage of owned dogs that are straying. It is advisable to use a slip lead rather than the standard, trigger-clip lead that clips on to the dog's collar. A collar that a stray dog is wearing should never be relied upon for capture or restraint. Many dogs have learnt the technique of slipping out of a collar and many are too loose, torn or worn for restraint purposes.

Use: Place over a dog's head to facilitate capture and restraint.

Advantages: The majority of socialised dogs accept a lead. It can be used as a temporary wrap-around muzzle if necessary.

Disadvantages: Not suitable for aggressive dogs and dogs you cannot approach.



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Graspers (catchpoles)

Graspers come in a range of lengths, from 470mm to more than 1,500mm. They consist of a hollow pole through which a plastic-coated braided-steel lanyard is passed. This lanyard has a fixed loop that can be used for restraining an animal. The animal grasper is a useful piece of equipment, especially when dealing with aggressive dogs. The latest models have a locking system and a simple quick-release mechanism that can release the dog without the operator coming into contact with a potentially dangerous animal.

A short version of the grasper is a very useful everyday tool. Friendly dogs can be restrained by holding the grasper as if it were a normal slip lead. If the dog becomes unfriendly, the catcher can use a short section of tubing to hold the dog away.

Caution should be used when placing a grasper around the dog's head. Although many socialised dogs, which are used to a restraint around the neck, adapt readily to a grasper, many unsocialised or nervous dogs struggle quite violently. Many dogs bite the pole or the wire, causing injuries to their gums, tongue or mouth and there is considerable risk of causing a tracheal fracture. Most importantly, staff should not overtighten the noose as they could easily strangle the dog. If the tongue of the dog begins to turn blue in colour then the noose is too tight and should be loosened immediately.



City of Zagreb

Use: Allows the operative to restrain a dog while maintaining a safe distance.

Advantages: Dog is restrained and under control.

Disadvantages:

- Not all dogs accept a neck restraint.
- Dogs that are moving are difficult to catch.
- Dogs can be injured if the operator is not competent.

Hand snares

Hand snares come in a variety of styles and lengths, although the standard length is 1,200mm. The hand snare has a flexible polycarbonate shaft, with a cable attached at one end that is designed to slide along the length of the shaft. By bending the shaft into the shape of a bow, the operator can hold the cable under tension with his or her thumb, and this creates a loop for a dog's head to enter. When the cable is released it snaps shut over the dog and restrains it. Snares are particularly useful for free-running dogs. However, caution should be used as they are not suitable for long-term restraint on an aggressive dog.



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Use: Can be placed over a dog's head to catch it quickly.

Advantages: Enables the operator to catch a moving dog quickly and efficiently.

Disadvantages:

- Not all dogs accept a neck restraint.
- Only suitable on dogs you can approach.
- Not suitable for long-term restraint, especially on aggressive dogs.

Pole nets

Pole nets are useful for capturing dogs that are not socialised towards people. The depth of the net is more critical than the diameter: the net must be deep enough for the operator to twist the net to restrain a dog. Once a dog is fully restrained within the net, other procedures may be carried out safely and humanely. Some designs have removable poles that allow the nets to be 'locked' in place and enable two people to lift both the net and dog once caught. When used correctly this is a safe method of moving a dog from point of capture to a transport vehicle.



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Use: Can be used to capture moving dogs.

Advantages: Enables a proficient operator to catch a moving dog quickly and efficiently.

Disadvantages:

- Can be difficult to 'hide' when approaching suspicious dogs.
- Dogs can bite netting therefore the net requires frequent inspection and repair or replacement.

Other types of nets

Hoop net

In skilled hands a hoop net can be cast over a moving animal. It consists of a lightweight aluminium hoop about 100–150cm in diameter, with a net attached.

Drive net

This is a long net (4–5m long) suspended between two poles, which is designed to move a dog forward and then either enclose it or cut off a potential escape route. Two people are needed to operate one, ideally with a third person standing behind the net with a grasper. It is potentially suitable for helping to restrain an aggressive dog.

Throw net

This is simple in design and simple to use: a 2.4m² mesh net with its rim weighted to make casting easier. It can be thrown over an animal, catching it by surprise, usually when it is lying down.

Muzzles

There are three designs of commercially manufactured muzzle in common usage; each have their advantages.

Basket

Basket muzzles are usually manufactured out of plastic. The muzzle completely encloses the dog's mouth, although it does allow the dog to pant and drink. Therefore, the muzzle can be left in place for longer periods than other muzzles.

Box

Box muzzles are made from heavy duty leather and are more commonly seen on guard dogs. These muzzles completely encase the dog's mouth, prohibiting the dog from drinking. For short-term use these are the most effective muzzles.

Nylon

These muzzles are made of a strong nylon material strap which can be slipped over the dog's mouth and fastened by a plastic clip at the rear of its neck. They are only suitable for brief periods of muzzling as they do not allow the dog to either pant or drink. Caution is required as the dog's mouth is not completely enclosed and it may still be able to nip.

Tape

In addition, for fieldwork it is essential that all staff learn to muzzle a dog's mouth by means of a tape or bandage muzzle. A tape muzzle can be made from a roll of at least 2 inch-wide cotton gauze, a flat soft-webbing lead, or a strip of strong, soft material approximately 1m long.

- First form a loop from an overhand knot that is big enough to pass over the dog's muzzle.
- Holding the ends of the tape in both hands, with the knot side up, slip the loop over the dog's muzzle and pass up approximately halfway to the corner of the dog's mouth, then tighten.
- The ends pass under the dog's chin.
- Some staff may then form another overhand knot under the chin.
- The ends are then brought around either side of the dog's neck and finally tied off at the back with a bow for quick release.



WSPA



WSPA

Use: Once the muzzle is in place, a dog can be handled safely.

Advantages: Tape muzzles are more useful in field situations.

Disadvantages:

- Commercially manufactured muzzles come in many sizes.
- Caution should be exercised while putting the muzzle on.

Cage traps (live traps, box traps)

Stray dogs that are very elusive may be caught by live or box traps. This type of trap usually consists of a cage with a drop-down door that is attached to a tripping mechanism. Food (bait) is placed inside the trap and when the animal attempts to remove the food it activates the trip, causing the door to drop, which traps the animal inside.



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Use: Enables elusive dogs to be caught humanely.

Advantages: If the trap is positioned correctly and correct bait is used, it enables elusive dogs to be caught.

Disadvantages:

- Non-selective – often unwanted dogs (and other animals) are caught.
- Can be expensive – traps need to be secured and frequently monitored as they are occasionally stolen.
- People may release trapped dogs.

Chemical capture

Chemical capture is the term used for the capture of animals by tranquillising or anaesthetising them. It is considered a veterinary procedure and only qualified veterinarians or veterinary technicians, who have been trained in the use of the relevant drugs, should carry out such methods of capture.

Tranquillising agents

These are compounds that calm anxious animals; they do not fully anaesthetise. The agent most commonly used for dog control is acepromazine (ACP). ACP is available in either gel or tablet form and the normal method of delivery is via food with ACP added to it. It is important to note that different dogs react differently to tranquillising agents and some dogs recover quickly when they are alarmed. Tranquillising agents only provide a small window in which to secure the dog. Staff should still approach dogs calmly, quietly and out of their field of vision. They should also be prepared for the majority of dogs to recover quickly once caught.

Anaesthetising agents

These compounds completely anaesthetise an animal. Many drugs are available, however, drugs commonly used for chemical capture are either combinations of ketamine and xylazine (Rompun) or tiletamine (Zoletil). The recommended method of delivery is a dart (syringe) from a blow-pipe or by a syringe mounted on a pole when dogs are already restrained. However, anaesthetising agents are often delivered by a dart loaded into a gun. The RSPCA only condones the use of guns when all other options have been exhausted.

Use: To either sedate or anaesthetise a dog remotely.

Advantages:

- If used correctly the dog is subject to little trauma.
- Silent in operation.

Disadvantages:

- Requires training from a veterinarian.
- Need to estimate the dog's bodyweight in order to assess the dosage rate.
- Dart guns can seriously injure animals when used improperly at close range.
- Chemical capture should not be used in locations where dogs or people could be placed at risk, such as a busy urban areas or adjacent to a main highway.
- Not all recommended drugs are licensed for use in all countries.
- Different dogs react differently to sedation. Some dogs can move a considerable distance after eating a tranquillising agent or being hit by a dart. Staff must be prepared to follow the dog for a considerable time and should never leave an anaesthetised dog on the street.
- This method of capture can be expensive.

Comment

The RSPCA does not endorse the use of chemical capture as a first option. The commonly used drugs can be potentially fatal to the dog if used inappropriately. Any personnel carrying out a chemical capture should be good marksmen and correctly trained in the use of drugs.

Chemical capture should always be regarded as a last resort, to catch very difficult or potentially dangerous dogs when all other methods have failed. It should never be used in locations where the dog or the general public could be placed at risk, such as busy urban areas – road traffic accidents are a major risk with this method of capture.

Learning

All animals (including humans) can learn to discriminate what is and is not a threat. After repeated exposure to a threatening situation animals can learn a suitable avoidance strategy.

Stray dogs soon learn from threatening situations; examples of threats are:

- catchers' vehicles
- men carrying items of catching equipment
- groups of men advancing towards them
- unusual objects such as cage traps.

Their usual avoidance strategy is to run away. However, you can use their learning ability to your advantage by providing dogs with positive or rewarding experiences to associate with catching personnel, equipment or methods.

1. When attempting to catch a new group of dogs, two catchers feed the dogs for a few days without carrying any items of catching equipment.
2. Once the catchers have been accepted by the dogs, they can begin to carry items of equipment while still feeding the animals; at this stage they do not attempt to catch them.
3. Once the dogs have accepted this new situation, the catchers place the equipment on the ground then place the food next to the equipment.
4. Once the dogs are feeding without concern and have accepted this new situation it is then a fairly simple process to catch the dogs. The dogs have learned not to perceive the catchers and equipment as a threat.

Staff should be patient as this entire process can take a considerable period of time.

Lifting and carrying dogs

When lifting or carrying dogs the catcher should be concerned with personal safety. As their hands and arms are extremely close to the dog's mouth, it is wise to wear protective gloves. When the dog is restrained on a soft lead, the catcher can attempt a tape muzzle if the dog proves irritable. If the dog has a long enough muzzle, simply wrap the lead a few turns around the dog's mouth.

When carrying dogs, both ends of the dog need to be supported. Small dogs can be carried by an individual, but larger, heavier dogs should be carried by two members of the team to avoid staff injury.

Catchers must avoid scruffing (grasping tightly behind the neck) brachycephalic breeds, such as Pekinese or French bulldogs that have a domed head, flat nose and protruding eyes. The eyes of such dogs are set in very shallow sockets and holding them by the scruff can cause their eyes to become detached from their sockets.



Brian Faulkner



Brian Faulkner

- ▲ Learning: A stray dog taking food through a slip lead after two weeks of feeding in Dominica. Two novice volunteers were able to catch 40 dogs over the next five days.



Brian Faulkner

- ▲ A dog being carried correctly at the RSPCA animal centre in Ashley Heath, Hampshire, UK.

Transportation of dogs

It is important to provide a suitable vehicle for the transportation of dogs after capture. A well-designed vehicle is safer for the catchers when loading or unloading dogs and safer for the animals. Ideally a dog transport vehicle should have the following features.

- The vehicle should be enclosed with a good through-flow of air or fitted with an appropriate ventilation system.
- To facilitate the loading and unloading of dogs, the vehicle should have low ground clearance. If this is not possible, use a ramp to gain access to the rear. Alternatively, dogs can be transferred into transportation cages before being loaded onto the vehicle.
- Personnel in the cabin area should be isolated from the cargo area by a full bulkhead to prevent any animal fluids entering the cabin. Ideally an observation window should be fitted into the bulkhead.
- The vehicle should contain individual transport cages that can be easily removed and cleaned: dogs should not be able to interfere with one another while being transported.

The dog-catching vehicle can become a reservoir for diseases that can affect both humans and dogs. To control the spread of disease, it is essential to clean and disinfect the cages and cargo area each time dogs have been transported and unloaded.

Transportation time should be factored into the daily working schedule of catching staff. The longer they spend transporting dogs from place of capture to the holding facility, the less time they have for actually catching dogs. Take into account normal traffic congestion and avoid transporting dogs when a high volume of traffic is anticipated.



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▲ An animal collection vehicle in Coimbra, Portugal.

SUGGESTED PRECONDITIONS FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF DOGS

1. Transportation of dogs must comply with relevant legislation.
2. Transportation facilities (including cages and vehicles) must safeguard the health and welfare of the animals.
3. Dogs should be transported immediately after capture (or cessation of catching activities) and directly to the holding facility to be unloaded. Dogs should not be kept in the vehicle for prolonged periods of time. When the journey is particularly long or the animal is in poor condition, a break should be taken to provide water (unless the dog poses a serious risk to the public or staff). It is not recommended that catchers provide water in transit.
4. Dogs displaying obvious signs of sickness (discharge from the eyes or nose or excessive drooling) must be isolated from other dogs during transit or taken in a separate vehicle.
5. Dogs should not be transported with any other animal, devices or substances that could be considered harmful to their health and welfare.
6. Cats should not be transported in the cargo area of a vehicle while dogs are onboard.
7. Care should be taken when loading dogs into the vehicle. Transport containers should be stacked safely and securely.
8. Extremes of temperature should be avoided, especially when transporting anaesthetised dogs, so adequate heating or cooling methods must be in place. Temperatures in the vehicle must remain above 5°C and below 30°C. Remember that when vehicles are parked, temperatures can quickly reach 40–50°C in warm weather.
9. Transport containers should be constructed so that they can be easily sanitised to prevent the spread of any pathogenic micro-organisms.
10. Cargo areas of vehicles should be washed and sanitised immediately after each transfer of dogs to the holding facility.

HOLDING FACILITIES

It is important that holding facilities, where the dogs are taken after capture, are designed and run with the welfare of the animals in mind. This section relates to the practical aspects of keeping dogs within these facilities. It is based on RSPCA experience and is consistent with the OIE guidelines on kennelling⁹.

Many countries throughout the world have some form of holding facility for stray dogs. Some are managed directly by the local municipality or a contractor acting on its behalf, while others are managed by a local animal protection society. Each group may have their own philosophy on how dogs should be managed within the facility, however, the RSPCA believes that all dogs, irrespective of where they are held, have the same welfare needs and so the holding facility must take into account five essential 'freedoms'.

The Five Freedoms

1. **Freedom from hunger and thirst:** by providing ready access to fresh water and a balanced diet that maintains health and vigour.
2. **Freedom from pain, injury and disease:** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
3. **Freedom from fear and distress:** by ensuring conditions and treatment avoid mental suffering.
4. **Freedom from discomfort:** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
5. **Freedom to express normal behaviour:** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and appropriate company of the animal's own kind.

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For more detailed information on holding facilities in general, refer to the RSPCA International publication *Guidelines for the design and management of animal shelters*, which can be downloaded from: www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/Shelter%20guidelines.pdf

Impounding of dogs

It is compulsory for municipalities in many countries to provide kennelling for stray dogs at a holding facility for a pre-determined number of days; this can vary from 3 to 60 days but is usually between 7 and 14 days. The required period should allow owners sufficient time to reclaim a lost animal from the kennel. When deciding on a holding period, it is important to consider the legal holding period in your country and your shelter's physical capacity

for kennelling dogs in a manner that safeguards their welfare. For example, a municipal shelter with a small capacity and a lengthy holding period will have to reduce the number of dogs that can be caught.

Kennel staff

Staff at the holding facility should be trained in the safe handling of dogs, have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and be aware of the facility's operating procedures. Staffing levels should be determined by the maximum capacity of the facility. The number of kennel staff with specific responsibility for the cleaning of kennels and feeding of dogs should be, at an absolute minimum, a ratio of one member of staff to every 50 dogs. RSPCA animal centres operate a ratio of one member of staff for every 15 dogs.

Intake of dogs

When admitted to the holding facility all dogs should immediately be entered into a general register. This register should provide details such as:

- the time and date the dog was found
- where the dog was found
- a description of the dog i.e. sex, colour, whether lactating, if there's discharge from eyes or nose, etc.
- identification details i.e. collar tag, tattoo, microchip.

To ensure that this information is as accurate as possible, field staff must be familiar with procedures at the holding facility and able to immediately record the details of a dog's place of capture.

Upon arrival each dog should be assessed for signs of sickness or disease. Ideally, a veterinarian should make the initial assessment, with trained kennel staff monitoring the dogs throughout their stay. Staff should record signs of sickness on the dog's kennel card and bring these to the attention of the facility management.

Common signs of sickness are as follows:

- eyes are watery, appear swollen, or show discharge
- ears appear red or inflamed, show discharge, or have a foul odour
- nose shows discharge (mucus, blood, or pus) or is crusty
- sneezing, coughing or wheezing
- external parasites such as fleas and ticks
- indications of recent wounds or abscesses
- indications of lameness.

9. OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, chapter on the Control of Stray Dog Populations (as agreed on 27 May 2009).

In addition, you should:

- check faeces for indications of internal parasites and diseases in individual kennels
- check the dog for clean urine and any signs of vomiting or diarrhoea.

Kennel cards

Cards should be displayed on the doors of kennels, stating when and where each dog was caught.

In RSPCA animal centres these cards include additional management instructions such as health and behavioural assessments, staff checks, and any veterinary notes.

Water

Clean water should be provided as soon as a dog is placed in the kennel.

Quarantine

It is recommended that new intakes of dogs be placed into quarantine, away from the main section of the facility. The RSPCA isolates animals for 10 days. However, we appreciate that for many municipal dog pounds this may not be a practical option. In this case, new intakes should be isolated for at least 24 hours to enable either a veterinarian or trained technician to assess them.

Diet and feeding

While dogs are accommodated they should be provided with a good quality diet appropriate to their needs. Wherever possible, dry foods should be provided. Any fresh meat or offal must be thoroughly cooked and never given raw. Dogs should be fed at least once a day, although feeding twice a day is preferable as it creates greater interaction between animals and staff, and provides the animals with another means of alleviating boredom. Veterinary advice should be sought on diet and feeding regimes for specific dogs such as the elderly or very young, those that are sick, and pregnant or lactating females.



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Kennels

Each dog should have a minimum 2m² of accommodation, which is covered and draught-free, with a raised bed surface for sleeping (e.g. a plastic dog bed turned upside down or a wooden crate). The accommodation must be ventilated and have both natural and supplementary light. An open exercise area (a minimum of 2.5–3.5m²) should be attached to the sleeping area, so that a dog has the opportunity to move freely and has a view of outside the sleeping area. Fencing should be at least 2m high, made from secure wire mesh, and slope inwards at the top to prevent escape. Temperatures should be maintained between 10 and 26°C.

Animals should be given blankets as bedding and these must be changed daily and washed at 90°C with disinfectant as well as washing powder. If it is not possible to wash blankets, then it is best to provide several sheets of newspaper for the dogs to lie on, rather than the bare floor.

Dogs should be taken out of kennels and exercised at least once a day, while mental stimulation such as an activity toy should be provided to alleviate boredom.

Dogs that are kennelled together should be compatible in age, sex and temperament. Females should never be kennelled with male dogs unless they are neutered.

Kennels and adjoining runs should be cleaned and sanitised daily. The disinfectant used must be effective against a wide range of pathogens commonly found in a kennel environment, such as canine parvovirus and distemper. When building kennels, some simple design features make daily cleaning routines easier.

- The floors and walls in all buildings must have smooth, impermeable surfaces free of gaps and cracks, which harbour disease.
- Floors should slope towards a drain that is outside the animal's living area. A drain opening of at least 20cm diameter is recommended, and should be covered by a strainer grid. A mains sewer, a cesspit or a septic tank is essential.

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The section above outlines minimum standards based on RSPCA experience. Further information may be obtained from the RSPCA International publication *Guidelines for the design and management of animal shelters*, which can be downloaded from: www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/Shelter%20guidelines.pdf

Group kennelling

To increase kennel capacity, each daily intake of dogs can be kennelled together in a group. However, a number of problems are associated with this system. For example, it:

- can be difficult to monitor an individual dog's welfare requirements
- involves group feeding, which can lead to fighting between dogs and less dominant dogs going without food
- increases the risk of disease within the kennel environment
- can be difficult and dangerous for staff to gain access to the kennel
- can lead to overcapacity within a holding facility.

The RSPCA recognises that while group kennelling may be unavoidable in certain situations, it *should* be avoided whenever possible. Whenever municipalities are considering constructing new holding facilities, or redesigning existing ones, provision should be made to accommodate dogs individually or in compatible pairs.

Lost dogs

All holding facilities should have procedures in place to ensure that lost dogs are reunited with their owners. Publishing information about dogs on the municipal website or in the local media is an extremely useful way of helping owners reclaim lost animals. It can also encourage people to adopt animals that are not claimed.

Rehoming of dogs

Finding permanent homes for stray dogs can be difficult for municipalities and it is not usually a statutory requirement. However, if you work with other stakeholders, such as a local animal protection society, it is possible to rehome dogs. Rehoming can improve morale among staff and vastly improve the public perception of a holding facility or municipal kennels.

When offering dogs for adoption, bear in mind the following:

- checks should be in place to ensure dogs are compatible with the people adopting them
- dogs should not be offered to children under the age of 16 (in many countries dogs cannot be legally adopted by anyone under the age of 18)
- only dogs in good physical and mental health should be offered for adoption
- dogs must not be offered for purposes of vivisection or any other commercial activity.

Appropriate conditions need to be in place to welcome potential adopters. Further guidance is available on page 8 of the RSPCA International publication *Guidelines for the design and management of animal shelters*, which can be downloaded from: www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/Shelter%20guidelines.pdf

Neutering

Neutering is an essential component of population control and the RSPCA strongly recommends surgical neutering of all animals before they are rehomed. Uncontrolled breeding and abandonment among the owned animal population will undoubtedly be one of the key factors driving large numbers of stray animals onto the streets.

In many countries people are reluctant to adopt neutered dogs or to neuter their own pets. If this is the case, the public authorities and other stakeholders should cooperate to promote the benefits of neutering. The RSPCA advocates the neutering of domestic dogs as an important part of responsible ownership: neutering reduces the risk of cancer in both sexes and pyometra (an infection of the womb) in female dogs. It also has an influence on behaviour, which makes an animal less likely to be injured through fighting.

When there is a limited budget available and neutering all animals is not possible, it is advisable to selectively neuter either all males or females. Neutering males is cheaper, as the surgery is much simpler and will prevent disease, fighting and roaming. Neutering only females is more expensive but can make females easier to rehome as they will not come into season. The neutering of females will also have a greater impact on reducing the reproductive capacity of the dog population as a whole. It takes only a few un-neutered males to impregnate large numbers of females, so neutering large numbers of males will not necessarily lead to a reduction in the reproductive capacity of the dog population in a given area.

Vaccination

The ongoing vaccination of dogs that pass through your dog-control programme is vital as it helps prevent the spread of specific diseases. This benefits both public health and the health of the dogs themselves. In many countries it is mandatory to have dogs vaccinated to reduce the spread of rabies and this is regarded as a core vaccine. Other core vaccines in common usage are used to prevent canine distemper, canine parvovirus, the canine hepatitis virus and leptospirosis.

It is also advisable for dogs to receive prophylactic treatment for internal and external parasites.

Registration

The registration of dogs, which can also include the licensing of owners and the identification of the dogs, plays an important role in stray-dog control.

A register provides information on dogs and their owners. Their details are entered onto a database that helps to reunite lost dogs with their owners and provides proof of ownership should a dog be stolen.

Registration can also be linked to a mandatory rabies vaccination programme, providing information on a dog's vaccination status.

Owners may be charged a fee when they apply for a licence (see below) or to register their dogs. To encourage neutering of owned dogs, a reduced registration fee should be considered for neutered dogs.

Licensing

A licence provides proof of ownership of an individual dog. The owner pays an annual fee to the municipality (or central government) for the privilege of owning a dog. If the owner has more than one dog, he or she needs a separate licence for each adult dog (generally when over six months of age).

A statutory licence can encourage a more responsible attitude to dog ownership as the licence can be taken away if the owner abuses the dog, promotes dangerous practices (dog fighting) or habitually allows the dog to roam. If a licence is taken back, it would allow the local authority to seize the dog for rehoming.

Fees paid for dog licences can help finance elements of the overall dog-control strategy.

Identification

This term covers various methods of identifying individual dogs, both permanent and non-permanent, which are listed below. Check national legislation to see which practices are allowed in your country.



■ Collars with identity tag

Identity tags are used mainly for owned dogs and the inscription should bear the owner's contact details. Some municipalities insist that owned dogs have two tags. The additional tag is renewed annually via the municipality and colour coded for different years.

This clearly visible symbol shows at a glance that the dog is registered to a licensed owner and that its vaccination status is up to date.



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■ Collars

Collars are commonly used in Catch Neuter Vaccinate Return (CNVR) strategies to identify a dog that has been neutered. Collars can help improve the status of dogs returned to the street within a community, increasing the perception that the dog is 'owned' by the local community.

Collars can be easily lost or removed and therefore a permanent method of identification is also required.

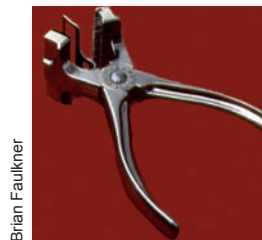


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■ Ear notching

Ear notching is also common in CNVR strategies. It is a permanent method of identification and will be clearly visible if the procedure is carried out correctly. Ear notching doesn't give any information on individual dogs and so should only be used in conjunction with another method, such as ear tattoos (see below).

Ear notching should only be performed while dogs are under a general anaesthetic.



Brian Faulkner

■ Ear tattoos

After the initial equipment costs, ear tattoos are a very cheap method of permanent identification.

Ear tattoos should be used in conjunction with another visible method of identification (see Ear notching, above).



Angela Hampton/RSPCA Photolibrary

■ Microchips

These are small electronic chips that are usually inserted below the skin at the base of the neck and between the dog's shoulders (scruff), although the location can vary. A scanner passing over the dog can 'read' the details held on the chip.

This identification method is widely used for owned-dog registration programmes. Microchipping is often seen as expensive, but it provides permanent identification throughout the animal's life. The cost can be reduced by buying microchips in bulk. Microchipping should be used in conjunction with a visible method of identification. Microchips and scanners should comply with ISO standards.

Ear tags

These are becoming more common in CNVR strategies and are used for the same reason as a collar: to identify dogs that have been neutered. They are applied in a similar manner to cattle or sheep tags and are usually brightly coloured, which means they can be seen from a distance. They are also numbered so that an individual dog's information can be entered onto a database.

The RSPCA feels that this method has some considerable disadvantages for dogs: the tags can be removed or torn off through dog-to-dog fighting or snagging, and the puncture site often becomes infected with bacteria or parasites. We would therefore discourage their use and encourage the use of other methods.



WSPA

Euthanasia

The RSPCA is opposed to the euthanasia of fit and healthy animals. The Society nevertheless accepts, with great reluctance, that in certain circumstances euthanasia may be necessary, in particular in the case of unwanted or stray animals for which good homes are not available. Your criteria for the euthanasia of dogs should be documented within your Standard Operating Procedures (see right).

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Further guidance on euthanasia can be found on page 16 of the ICAM Coalition's publication *Humane dog population management guidance*, which can be downloaded from: www.icam-coalition/resources

Written protocols on euthanasia can also be found on the ICAM website: www.icam-coalition.org

Standard operating procedures

Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are written instructions that document specific tasks and routine activities, as well as the staff who are responsible for them. SOPs should detail all the procedures that need to be followed from the point of capture, through transport and kennelling, to the point where the dog leaves the care of your staff. Clear and consistent SOPs clarify the work of the dog-control service both to staff and the general public, minimising potential misunderstandings.

Within a programme, detailed SOPs will:

- ensure that all staff are performing their roles properly
- prevent mistakes being made
- ensure consistency within a programme
- reduce dependence on particular individuals for decision making
- ensure continuity should individual staff leave
- help evaluate workers' competence
- help develop training in key areas.

Developing a set of SOPs is a detailed exercise. It is important to look at every task that needs to be carried out in order for a dog-control programme to operate effectively. However, once a set of SOPs is in place, updating and adapting it to reflect changing conditions becomes much easier.

An example of a standard operating procedure (SOP)

In the box overleaf is an example of a SOP on lost and found dogs extracted from a working document for a kennel that included 24 other procedures. This SOP has been selected because it is relatively simple. The SOPs surrounding more sensitive issues such as euthanasia are generally much more detailed and include a number of subsections detailing conditions that must be met during each part of the process.

Lost and found dogs

General

It is the goal of this dog service to return all strays entering the kennel to their owners and to provide assistance to those who have lost pets or to individuals who have found lost animals.

Matching animals

All dogs entering the kennels will be recorded with a description of the dog; date found; location where animal was found; and any other forms of identification. The person handling the intake of stray dogs brought to the pound will promptly check the lost dog register. In addition to other information, the intake card will include the initials of the employee and the initial date that lost reports were checked.

Office staff are responsible for the daily checking of descriptions of stray animals currently at the shelter against lost reports on file and noting the date on the intake slip.

Calls from owners reporting lost animals and lost dog register

Any time an individual calls or visits the kennels to report a lost animal, office staff will complete the appropriate form and obtain as much detailed information as possible. Completed forms should be filed in the lost dog register. This register is to be checked whenever stray dogs are brought to the pound and the owner should be contacted immediately when a match is made.

Office staff should inform the owner of the procedure involved in returning the dog to them (detailed in the next SOP) and indicate on the original intake card the name, address and telephone number of the potential owner along with the date of communication.

Furthermore, office staff should educate residents when reporting lost dogs about responsible pet care, including the benefits of spaying or neutering, the hazards of leaving animals outside unattended and the importance of identification.



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▲ Humane animal handling workshop for municipal staff in Portugal.



RSPCA International

▲ An animal control officer at work in Tallin, Estonia.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

The information in this document provides general guidance only and will need to be adapted to suit local conditions.

Enquiries can be referred to:

RSPCA International
Wilberforce Way, Southwater,
Horsham, West Sussex
RH13 9RS
United Kingdom

E-mail: international@rspca.org.uk

Useful publications

The following documents can be found at:
www.icam-coalition.org/resources.html

Humane dog population management guidance

English, Spanish, Turkish and Thai versions of this report are available to download.

Surveying roaming dog populations – guidelines on methodology

This document provides detailed guidance on how to carry out a dog population survey in public areas, and can be used as the basis for planning or evaluating a dog population management intervention.

Non-surgical methods for controlling the reproduction of dogs and cats

This document provides a brief overview of current knowledge regarding the practical application of non-surgical contraception and sterilisation for dogs and cats.

Identification methods for dogs and cats

This document describes the key methods of identification suitable for dogs and cats, in order to aid decision making and provide guidance on procedures and equipment.

Guidelines for the design and management of animal shelters (under 'Shelter')

This booklet sets out all the areas to consider when building and managing an animal shelter.

Methods for the euthanasia of dogs and cats

This document provides guidance on the euthanasia of dogs and cats by identifying both methods that are considered humane and methods that might compromise animal welfare.

The following are also useful.

A practitioners' guide to working dog welfare, Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research, Volume 3, Issue 4, N. Rooney, S. Gaines, E. Hiby.

Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Pet Animals (Strasbourg, 1987). Available to download from:
<http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/125.htm>

OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, chapter on the Capture of Stray Dog Populations – agreed as publication went to print. It will become available at: www.oie.int

Useful websites

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals:
www.rspca.org.uk

Alliance for Rabies Control: www.rabiescontrol.net

British Small Animal Veterinary Association: www.bsava.org.uk

International Companion Animal Management Coalition:
www.icam-coalition.org

International Fund for Animal Welfare: www.ifaw.org

Humane Society International: www.hsus.org/hsi

National Dog Warden Association: www.ndwa.co.uk

World Society for the Protection of Animals: www.wspa.org.uk

World Small Animal Veterinary Association: www.wsava.org



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