




ASILOMAR ACCORDS

SAVING LIVES NOT POINTING FINGERS

*“Our mission will be:
Working together to save the lives of all healthy and treatable companion animals.”*



In some ways, how an organization chooses to combat the pet overpopulation problem is as important as how dedicated it is to saving animals. For many in the field, this disjointed nature is simply another hard reality in an already grim situation. The purpose of the recent Asilomar Accords, however, is to build understanding within the animal welfare community that those distinctions are not only unnecessary but also counter-productive.

American Humane Association President and CEO Marie Belew Wheatley concurs. “We made the decision to work with organizations in the Accords and with our constituents to become more about saving lives and less about pointing fingers.”

“We recognize that all stakeholders in the animal welfare community have a passion for and are dedicated to the mutual goal of saving animal lives.”

– *The Asilomar Accords, August 2004*



FOSTERING RESPECT

To the newly initiated, the name “Asilomar Accords” conjures images of monumental and

world-changing meetings of the minds – like the Geneva Conventions. While the actual gathering might not have had the flashbulbs and red carpets that accompany diplomats from the world’s most influential countries, that “peace treaty feel” is not far off the mark. For leaders in all aspects of animal welfare – animal control, humane societies, advocacy groups, animal shelters, and sanctuaries – agreeing to lay aside differences and work together toward a common goal is indeed monumental and unifying.

The crucial first step entailed laying aside “trash-and-bash” language.

Just as a negotiation of international ambassadors requires the presence of many translators, the first order of business at the Asilomar meeting, named for the meeting’s location in Asilomar, California, was to find a common language. The crucial first step entailed laying aside “trash-and-bash” language. Or, as the Accords more precisely phrase it: “In the interest of harmony and forward progress, we encourage that language and terminology which has been historically viewed as hurtful or divisive by certain animal welfare stakeholders should be

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phased out as it relates to specific agencies or specific practices.” Some examples are phrases such as “rescue from animal control,” which insinuates conditions so poor as to warrant rescuing; “open-door shelter,” which implies superiority and can be misleading; and “no-kill shelter,” which is also misleading and hurtful to any group that does not label itself “no-kill.”

“No organization wants to kill animals!” says Wheatley. “All shelters want to save as many healthy, adoptable animals as possible and find good homes for them.” She adds, “The Accords could only be created by all participants agreeing that bashing another part of the community won’t solve the problem -- only dialogue and collaborative solutions will.”

A NEW LANGUAGE

Working together, the Asilomar group established a system of classification to assure consistent data collecting throughout the animal welfare community. They defined terms such as healthy, treatable, and unhealthy and untreatable to ensure that the animal situation under consideration is accurately represented by its statistics. The definitions are not meant to determine an animal’s outcome, only to create a standard for categorizing that will be uniform among all agencies. From there, the group adopted a formula to calculate the “live release rate” for both individual organizations (e.g., shelters) and the larger animal welfare community (e.g., feral cat groups, breed-specific placement groups).

The hope is that by clarifying language it will facilitate “community coalitions” that comprise a variety of organizations. The Accords state, “We are committed to the belief that no one organization or type of organization can solve the euthanasia problem alone, that we need one another, and that the only true solution for the future is to work together.”

While it might seem simple that speaking the same language and abstaining from disparaging others who share the same goal are important for working as community, “simple” does not necessarily equal “easy.” The idea for a summit of leaders was over a year-and-a-half in the making – not to mention all the years of resentment and miscommunication leading up to the point when the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) took the lead in inviting key players to a meeting and hiring a facilitator. But the work of unifying the animal welfare community has not ended with the completion of the conference.

ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

Developing a common set of definitions and addressing old wounds were necessary steps to arrive at a place where collaboration between different agencies and groups could be successful. And that is, in fact, the central motivation to drafting the Asilomar Accords: Approaching animal welfare as a community-wide challenge. The causes of animal overpopulation, neglect, and abuse are diverse – ranging from ignorance to poverty to cultural biases and societal violence – and therefore a variety of solutions must be employed. Based on this, the common goal of saving lives cannot be done by any one branch of the animal welfare community working in a vacuum.

But what will be different in our work once the Accords are implemented? Aside from changing the way an organization classifies its animals and collects data and not allowing derogatory or divisive language, what will actually change in the day-to-day organizational operation?

Although most shelters already keep records, Tara Hall, assistant director of operations at Denver’s Dumb Friends League points out that the Accords will offer organizations a new tool and a common method of tracking data to identify which programs

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are successful. The calculations allow an organization to determine where its resources are going and whether they're being used in the best way. For example, Hall says the Accords could be used to assess the Dumb Friends League's TLC program, which provides extended care for adoptable animals with minor illnesses. "We'll be able to see that, because of our TLC program, we were able to put up this many of our URI cases for adoption, and maybe those animals would have otherwise gone into foster."

But even more important than what the Accords change for an individual organization is what they will offer to community-wide cooperative efforts. While acknowledging how new the Accords are, Hall has high hopes for the opportunities for collaboration. "So, shelter-to-shelter," she says, referring to the example of accurate data on URI cats, "if another shelter wants to start a capital campaign for a TLC program, they can demonstrate what it will do by using already existing data."

Offering another example that highlights the all-too-frequent situation of adoptable animals being euthanized because of a lack of funding, a situation wealthier communities may never face, Hall adds, "If I'm a shelter without the resources to treat kennel cough, and there's another one with an isolation area, I'll be able to contact them and see if I can maybe trade these five dogs I have with kennel cough for five healthy dogs."

A NEW SHARED VISION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

Within the animal welfare world, the idea of breaking down the barriers that for so long have divided various efforts is both daunting and inspiring. So, what will our animal-centered community be like without "the pound" and "no-kill" or "open-admission" shelters? According to Tara Hall, the Accords "signify that we're all coming from the same place, coming from the same data, speaking the same language." Similarly, Belew Wheatley believes the Accords will, "bring us to higher ground to lead us to that shared mission."

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These leaders participated in the original, and/or subsequent Asilomar meetings, and were involved in the drafting of the "Asilomar Accords."

Marie Belew Wheatley	American Humane Association
Edwin Sayres	American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Cheryl Naumann	Arizona Humane Society
Gregory Castle	Best Friends Animal Society
Michael Mountain	Best Friends Animal Society
Jane McCall	Dubuque Humane Society
Robert Rohde	Dumb Friends League
John Nagy	Dumb Friends League & the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA)
Belinda Lewis	Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control
Pamela Burns	Hawaiian Humane Society & The National Council on Pet Population Study & Policy
Nancy McKenney	Humane Society for Seattle/King County
Jan McHugh-Smith	Humane Society of Boulder Valley
Richard Avanzino	Maddie's Fund
Perry Fina	North Shore Animal League and The Pet Savers Foundation
Karen Terpstra	Pasadena Humane Society & SPCA
Dave Loftus	Pet-Ark
Mark Goldstein, D.V.M.	San Diego Humane Society and SPCA
Dan Morrison	Southeast Area Animal Control Authority
Mark Byers	Spanish Fork Animal Control (UT) & the National Animal Control Association (NACA)
Gary Tiscornia	SPCA of Monterey County & the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA)
Martha Armstrong	The Humane Society of the United States
John Snyder	The Humane Society of the United States
Steven McHugh	Unison Business Development

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While no one can fully predict what this new world of animal welfare will be like, a good guess is it will be one with a lot more community cooperation and, eventually, a lot fewer unwanted animals.

1. The mission of those involved in creating the Asilomar Accords is to work together to save the lives of all healthy and treatable companion animals.
2. We recognize that all stakeholders in the animal welfare community have a passion for and are dedicated to the mutual goal of saving animals' lives.
3. We acknowledge that the euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals is the sad responsibility of some animal welfare organizations that neither desired nor sought this task. We believe that the euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals is a community-wide problem requiring community-based solutions. We also recognize that animal welfare organizations can be leaders in bringing about a change in social and other factors that result in the euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals, including the compounding problems of some pet owners'/guardians' failure to spay and neuter; properly socialize and train; be tolerant of; provide veterinary care to; or take responsibility for companion animals.
4. We, as animal welfare stakeholders, agree to foster a mutual respect for one another. When discussing differences of policy and opinion, either publicly or within and among our own agencies, we agree to refrain from denigrating or speaking ill of one another. We will also encourage those other individuals and organizations in our sphere of influence to do the same.
5. We encourage all communities to embrace the vision and spirit of these Accords, while acknowledging that differences exist between various communities and geographic regions of the country.
6. We encourage the creation of local "community coalitions" consisting of a variety of organizations (e.g., governmental animal control agencies, nonprofit shelters, grassroots foster care providers, feral cat groups, funders and veterinary associations) for the purpose of saving the lives of healthy and treatable animals. We are committed to the belief that no one organization or type of organization can achieve this goal alone, that we need one another, and that the only true solution is to work together. We need to find common ground, put aside our differences and work collaboratively to reach the ultimate goal of ending the euthanasia of healthy and treatable companion animals.
7. While we understand that other types of programs and efforts (including adoption, spay and neuter programs, education, cruelty investigations, enforcement of animal control laws and regulations, behavior and training assistance and feral cat management) play a critical role in impacting euthanasia figures, for purposes of this nationwide initiative we have elected to leave these programs in the hands of local organizations and encourage them to continue offering, and expanding upon, these critical services.

8. In order to achieve harmony and forward progress, we encourage each community coalition to discuss language and terminology which has been historically viewed as hurtful or divisive by some animal welfare stakeholders (whether intentional or inadvertent), identify “problem” language, and reach a consensus to modify or phase out language and terminology accordingly.
9. We believe in the importance of transparency and the open sharing of accurate, complete animal-sheltering data and statistics in a manner which is clear to both the animal welfare community and the public.
10. We believe it is essential to utilize a uniform method for collecting and reporting shelter data, in order to promote transparency and better assess the euthanasia rate of healthy and treatable animals. We determined that a uniform method of reporting needs to include the collection and analysis of animal-sheltering data as set forth in the “Animal Statistics Table.” These statistics need to be collected for each individual organization and for the community as a whole and need to be reported to the public annually (e.g., web sites, newsletters, annual reports). In addition, we determined that each community’s “Live Release Rate” needs to be calculated, shared and reported annually to the public, individually by each organization and jointly by each community coalition. Both individual organizations and community coalitions should strive for continuous improvement of these numbers. The “Animal Statistics Table” and formulas for calculating the “Live Release Rate” are set forth in Section IV of these Accords.
11. We developed several standard “definitions” to enable uniform and accurate collection, analysis and reporting of animal-sheltering data and statistics. We encourage all communities to adopt the definitions which are set forth in Section III, and implement the principles of these Accords.
12. While we recognize that many animal welfare organizations provide services to companion animals other than dogs and cats, for purposes of this nationwide initiative we have elected to collect and share data solely as it relates to dogs and cats.
13. We are committed to continuing dialogue, analysis and potential modification of this vision as needs change and as progress is made toward achieving our mission.
14. Those involved in the development of the Asilomar Accords have agreed to make a personal commitment to ensure the furtherance of these accords, and to use their professional influence to bring about a nationwide adoption of this vision.

III. DEFINITIONS

In order to facilitate the data collection process and assure consistent reporting across agencies, the following definitions have been developed. The Asilomar participants hope that these definitions are applied as a standard for categorizing dogs and cats in each organization. The definitions, however, are not meant to define the outcome for each animal entrusted to our care. A glossary and more specific details and examples are included in the appendix portion of this document.

HEALTHY

The term “healthy” means and includes all dogs and cats eight weeks of age or older that, at or subsequent to the time the animal is taken into possession, have manifested no signs of a behavioral or temperamental characteristic that could

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pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and have manifested no sign of disease, injury, a congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the health of the animal, or that is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future.

TREATABLE

The term "treatable" means and includes all dogs and cats who are "rehabilitatable" and all dogs and cats who are "manageable."

Rehabilitatable: The term "rehabilitatable" means and includes all dogs and cats who are not "healthy," but who are likely to become "healthy," if given medical, foster, behavioral, or other care equivalent to the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community.

Manageable: The term "manageable" means and includes all dogs and cats who are not "healthy" and who are not likely to become "healthy," regardless of the care provided; but who would likely maintain a satisfactory quality of life, if given medical, foster, behavioral, or other care, including long-term care, equivalent to the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring owners/guardians in the community; provided, however, that the term "manageable"

does not include any dog or cat who is determined to pose a significant risk to human health or safety or to the health or safety of other animals.

UNHEALTHY AND UNTREATABLE

The term "unhealthy and untreatable" means and includes all dogs and cats who, at or subsequent to the time they are taken into possession,

- 1) have a behavioral or temperamental characteristic that poses a health or safety risk or otherwise makes the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and are not likely to become "healthy" or "treatable" even if provided the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community; or
- 2) are suffering from a disease, injury, or congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the animal's health or is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future, and are not likely to become "healthy" or "treatable" even if provided the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community; or
- 3) are under the age of eight weeks and are not likely to become "healthy" or "treatable," even if provided the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community.