




MEMORANDUM

Date: August 2, 2018

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **PACC Director's Animal Safety Report**

Pima Animal Care Center (PACC) has emerged as a national leader by implementing programs and policies geared towards getting pets out alive achieving a 90 percent save rate. Recent local and national news stories have reported on bite incidents involving adopted pets making the case that rehabilitating and placing pets from shelter settings across the nation with behavioral or bite histories is not in the public interest.

PACC's Director, Kristen Auerbach, recently provided a review of historical community bite data as well new efforts to promote the safety of the community, our employees and volunteers. I think she effectively shows that there has been no significant increase in biting animals in Pima County, despite the fact that PACC has dramatically reduced euthanasia by placing record numbers of pets.

As a large, open-admission shelter, euthanasia will be necessary. Pets that are medically suffering and cannot be treated and those that pose an immediate threat to public safety are humanely euthanized. Nevertheless, thanks to PACC's medical and behavioral support teams, every single pet receives an individualized evaluation and disposition.

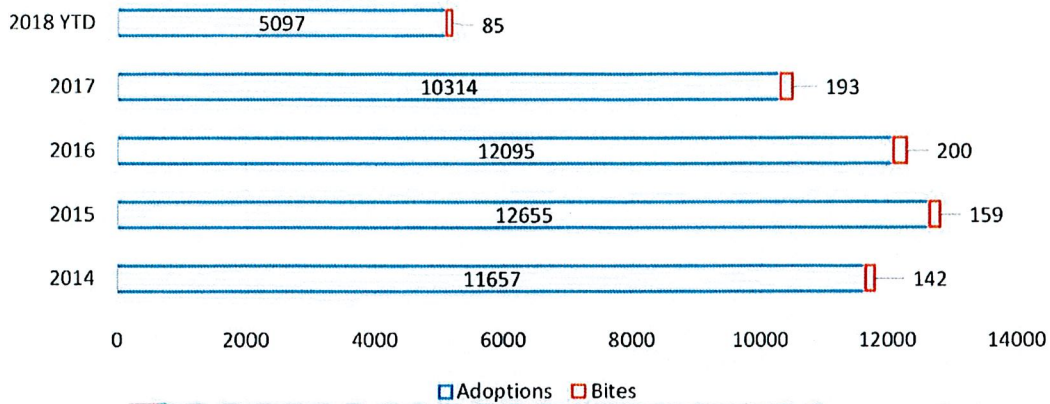
I have asked the Director and the Assistant County Administrator to continue to carefully monitor data surrounding animal aggression and dog bites to ensure that any concerning trends are identified and addressed in a timely fashion.

CHH/mp

Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Dr. Francisco Garcia, Assistant County Administrator for Community and Health Services
Kristen Auerbach, Director of Pima Animal Care Center

Figure 4: Number of bites involving adopted and total number of dog adoptions, by calendar year.



Note: In 2017, PACC stopped including the number of pets transferred to rescue groups in its adoption numbers. This explains, in part, a decrease in overall recorded adoptions.

At PACC, dogs are euthanized every week for biting and other aggressive incidents reported by owners or victims. Most of these dogs were not adopted from a shelter or rescue, but are often unsterilized, unvaccinated dogs that were bought or otherwise obtained in the community. As the open admission shelter for Pima County, PACC is mandated to take these dogs and humanely euthanize them when they are either legally deemed dangerous or otherwise considered an immediate threat to public safety.

Today, a dedicated behavior and enrichment team of staff and volunteers provide rehabilitation to fearful, under-socialized and untrained dogs who come to PACC. When evaluating dogs with behavioral histories for potential placement, the team looks at bite severity, circumstances of the incident surrounding the bite, and the overall temperament of the dog. Dogs with more serious histories are euthanized immediately, but other dogs have potential live outcome options. Specialty volunteer programs like the Decompression and TOP Dogs programs work to rehabilitate high-risk dogs. For those dogs with behavioral histories or challenges that cannot be reasonably accommodated at the shelter, PACC works with several rescue partners who are able to provide longer-term rehabilitation and training to help dogs become adoptable.

One recent example involves more than 20 dogs who had lived their entire lives in a yard, with no socialization from humans. These dogs displayed feral behavior and were initially unable to even be walked on a leash or touched. The Decompression Program volunteers began working with the dogs to teach them how to be touched and handled by people. Eventually a rescue partner took all of the dogs into their custody where they're living together and undergoing long term rehabilitation so they can eventually be adopted into loving homes. These dogs will take many months to rehabilitate, something PACC simply could not accommodate. Thanks to support from volunteers and rescue partners, all the dogs were saved.

Community Placement Process: PACC takes in approximately 10,000 dogs and puppies every year and the vast majority of these are happy, healthy pets with no issues. These pets all find homes, and for people who want to save a dog or cat with a special medical or behavioral challenge, PACC has pets for them, too. Our goal is that every pet a "fair chance" or individualized assessment, and many community

members come to PACC seeking out pets recovering from illness or injury or those needing behavioral support and rehabilitation.

Adopters and fosters receive in-person counseling about the dog or cat they are considering so they fully understand all known behavior and medical history. Additionally, they receive written medical and behavioral notes, as well as sign an agreement stating they received this information. For dogs and cats with any bite histories or in-shelter behavioral challenges, adopters receive counseling from staff and volunteers on managing common behavioral challenges and preventing bites. PACC is continuously reassessing the types of information and needs of those community members who take on pets either in an adoption or foster placement.

PACC Safety Procedures: Over the past year, PACC has implemented a variety of measures to further improve safe handling and placement of dogs and cats from the shelter with the goal of improving the safety of the community, the staff and the volunteers. These include:

Dog Play Groups: Dog play groups are used as an evaluation method for dogs with unknown histories. Because the majority of dogs entering PACC are strays of unknown origin, play groups allow shelter staff to evaluate dogs in a real-life setting, assessing their behavior with other dogs and in a high energy environment, much like a dog park.

Behavior and Enrichment Team: Using a combination of grant and operations funding, PACC has a four-member behavior and enrichment team who conduct handling, walking and play group assessments, provide behavioral modification and training, make behavioral euthanasia and placement decisions, and dispense enrichment items to help reduce kennel stress. This team handles approximately 1,000 shelter dogs every month.

Specialized Training: PACC volunteers wishing to work with dogs with behavioral histories or challenges undergo advanced training and are invited to participate in a special volunteer group called TOP Dogs, designed to help volunteers safely work with challenging dogs. This group is led by two volunteers, one of whom is a *Prior* certified dog trainer and has started a course called 'Canine Fun Camp'. The camp trains volunteers to work with more challenging dogs on obedience through positive-reinforcement training.

Safety Equipment in Kennels: PACC purchased safety equipment and first aid kits that have been placed in 20 different functional areas of the shelter including the clinic, play yards and kennel areas. Items in the safety buckets include 'break' sticks for opening a dog's jaw during a bite incident, air horns and pet correctors to interrupt aggression, extra leashes and other items depending on the area. PACC is also in the process of purchasing radios for all staff working in the shelter to quickly communicate about emergency and urgent situations.

Safety Equipment in Animal Protection and Enforcement Vehicles: With support from the Pima County Risk Management Department, PACC purchased new safe handling equipment for all animal protection trucks including nets, catch poles, safety gloves, and bite interruption tools.

Color Dot Handling System: Dogs are sorted into levels by staff based on how easy or challenging they are to handle in the shelter. Each color requires a different level of training and approval. Green dots are the easiest, followed by blue dots who may be fearful or just strong pullers, and then orange dots who display jumpy/mouthy or reactive behavior. Red dots are utilized for several types of dogs: those on

stray hold, those who will not be placed for adoption due to safety risk, and those needing further evaluation.

At-Risk Dogs Protocol: Dogs at risk of euthanasia for behavioral reasons are evaluated and processed using a proven protocol that involves staff and volunteer input and collaborative decision-making when it comes to life and death choices.

Summary: Despite a dramatic reduction in euthanasia over the past six years, there has been no significant increase in animal bites in the community despite a record number of adoptions. PACC continues to carefully monitor data surrounding animal aggression and dog bites to ensure that any concerning trends or issues are identified and addressed immediately. PACC assures corrective actions, including training and obtaining additional safety equipment, are taken for any concerning trends. The Board's leadership and your support as County Administrator have been critical to the continued progress of animal welfare in this community, and PACC is thankful for the your continued support and that of our community.