

Membership News & Publications Professional Development Economics & Practice Advocacy Meetings & Events Ab

You are here: [Home](#) | [Knowledge Base](#) | [Resources](#) | [Reference](#) | [Animal Welfare](#)

Animal Welfare

[Companion Animals](#)

[Equids](#)

[Food & Fiber Animals](#)

[Laboratory Animals](#)

[Other Species](#)

[The Profession](#)

[Students](#)

[People](#)

[Advocacy & Policy](#)

[Education](#)

[Humane Endings](#)

[Publications & Meetings](#)

[Volunteer](#)

Aquatic Veterinary Medicine

Disaster Preparedness

Diversity & Inclusion

Human-Animal Bond

Animal Rescue—Transporting Fido Across State Lines

AVMA Welfare Focus Newsletter - Featured Article - November 2011

Dr. Martha Smith-Blackmore and Mr. Glenn Kolb

The challenge

Puppies and dogs are increasingly being transported over long distances across the United States in response to societal interests. A shortage (or sometimes the perception of a shortage) of certain types of dogs available for adoption in a particular area creates a demand for puppies and dogs that may outstrip the local supply. Shortages may be the consequence of spay and neuter efforts that have substantially reduced the unwanted dog population resulting in few adoptable puppies or dogs in the community. In other cases, there may be locally available puppies or dogs, but good communication or transportation is lacking to get the dogs from under-resourced shelters or municipal facilities (pounds) to sites where adoptions can occur. Or, the types of dogs available for adoption (e.g., larger breed, energetic, poorly trained adolescent dogs) may not fit the profile of the type of dog adoptive families are seeking. The availability of purpose-bred dogs in the community may or may not impact demand, because people looking to add a puppy or dog to their family may feel strongly about 'rescuing' a dog rather than purchasing one.

Dog relocation efforts increased exponentially after Hurricane Katrina affected Mississippi and Louisiana in 2004. Suddenly, the number of displaced and homeless dogs in those states far outstripped the resources available to care for them. Shelters in areas as far away as Oregon and New England stepped up to help and received these dogs. Relationships and lines of communication established during these relocation efforts laid the groundwork for ongoing transports.

In addition to shelter-to-shelter relocations, other programs have emerged that move dogs freely around the country. These range from informal, grassroots efforts

by well-intentioned individuals, to commercial operations that profit from selling puppies under the guise of adoption. Animals may be moved by commercial animal transporters, volunteer-driven privately owned vehicles, or even small or large aircraft. The numbers dogs being relocated are impossible to track because of the diverse nature of this activity.

The best programs screen puppies and dogs at their origin for infectious diseases and aggressive behavior. Vaccinations, treatment and prevention for parasitic infestations, and medical treatment for other infectious conditions are provided before dogs and puppies are allowed to travel. Good programs do not transport dogs that pose a risk of carrying infectious diseases to the destination facility, those that pose a public health risk because of aggression or zoonotic disease, or those whose welfare will likely suffer during the process (e.g., those that are heavily pregnant, injured, or arthritic, or that have especially nervous dispositions). Well-run programs will also reclaim animals for re-homing if the original placement did not succeed, and will work with adopters if infectious diseases or behavioral problems become apparent soon after relocation. Originating shelters can benefit from an increase in their live release rate, reducing the number of dogs that have to be euthanized locally due to overpopulation. This can also free up resources (financial and staff time) to facilitate improved care for the dogs left behind in the shelter, and allow more spay and neuter outreach to the community to assist in addressing the community's overpopulation of dogs.

Because the interstate transport of puppies and dogs for adoption or rescue (rather than for sale) is not an activity regulated under the federal [Animal Welfare Act](#), there is no federal oversight of the conditions under which these dogs are transported. However, all dogs transported in commerce by USDA-licensees or registrants must be accompanied by a valid veterinary health certificate issued within 10 days of transport. Some states have enacted legislation to prohibit the sale of animals in parking lots (e.g., California Penal Code [597.4](#); Texas Transportation Code [285.001](#)) or to regulate the relocation of animals to their state (e.g., Connecticut General Statutes [435, Sec. 22-354](#)). It is unclear how effective these regulations will be, given the very real limitations (both opportunity and resources) inherent to enforcing such laws. In addition, federal lawmakers have introduced the Puppy Uniform Protection and Safety Act (PUPS; [H.R. 835, S. 707](#)), which would close the loophole in the Animal Welfare Act that allows direct internet sales of puppies and dogs to consumers without regulatory oversight.

How veterinarians can help

Veterinarians can help individuals and organizations involved in the transport of puppies and dogs by educating them about best practices for transport, not only from an infectious disease perspective, but also from a comfort and safety perspective. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' publication [Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#) outlines some best practices for animal transport. Other resources include the National Federation of Humane Societies' *Companion Animal Transport Programs Best Practices*, the National Institute of Health's [Animal Transportation Guidelines](#), the International Air Transport Association's [Live Animal Regulations](#), and the [Animal Transportation Association](#).

Because unapparent pre-patent periods mean infectious disease risk cannot be reduced to zero, there will always be a role for veterinarians in advising best practices for quarantine and treatment of animals who become ill after transport. In addition, shipping of puppies and dogs can be stressful despite best efforts to

provide for their comfort, and some animals may be affected by stress-induced disease or other conditions (e.g., colitis).

Veterinarians can also help improve the welfare of transported and relocated animals through education of their clients and the public. Efforts to prohibit these activities are unlikely to stop the interstate rescue of surplus community puppies and dogs, and may contribute to worsening the welfare of these animals as the activity moves underground. To save dogs from euthanasia, many individuals will readily violate the law and an underground railroad for dogs is likely to continue to thrive. Veterinarians can help minimize the number of animals that need to be transported by doing their part to ensure that local dogs available for adoption are provided every opportunity to find a home.

As one example, the Massachusetts Animal Coalition has developed a program called **PILOT** (Pets In Limbo Out There) that moves puppies and dogs from shelters unable to place them due to resource limitations to other local shelters. As the number of unwanted puppies and dogs are reduced locally, a wider and wider net can be cast to help dogs in adjacent communities. Veterinarians should emphasize the importance of clear and open communication with transporters, awareness of and compliance with local laws/regulations, and the responsibilities of all parties involved to ensure that animal and human health and welfare are protected.

« [Back to AVMA Welfare Focus Newsletter Library](#)



OTHER AVMA SITES

[Externs on the Hill](#)
[National Pet Week](#)

[Animal Health SmartBrief](#)
[WebMD® Pet Health Community](#)

[Contact](#) | [Help](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

Copyright © 2016 American Veterinary Medical Association