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The Department usually employs 3 full-time Animal Control Officers, 1 full-time Administrative Assistant and 1 part-time Kennel Assistant. The Department is unable to utilize volunteer help as liability issues make workers' compensation insurance for volunteers cost prohibitive.

Reason for Investigation

The Grand Jury, under California Penal Code No. 914, is charged with the specific responsibility of investigating and reporting on all aspects of County government. The Animal Control Department had not been reviewed since the 2003-04 term. In addition, we received a complaint from a citizen and after reviewing the supporting documentation, determined a review of the Department was warranted and would be undertaken by this Grand Jury.

Procedures Followed

During the course of the investigation, this Grand Jury interviewed the Department Head and staff members. We reviewed the Department's General Orders, Safety Guidelines, various statistical data and internal documents. We also toured the Quincy facility.

Findings

1. The "Animal Control Safety Guidelines" manual is incomplete. There is no written Departmental policy or procedure on accidental needle sticks. Also, the "Animal Control General Orders" manual is incomplete. There is no written Departmental procedure on euthanasia.
2. The Animal Control Department is under the supervision of the Sheriff's Department. Employees of Animal Control are represented by the Operating Engineers Union whereas the employees of the Sheriff's Department are members of the Sheriff's Association. These two entities have different standards and operating practices.
3. Many of the laws applicable to the Animal Control Department fall under the Agricultural Code rather than the Penal Code.
4. On average, Staff meetings are held only once per year.
5. Animal Control General Order Section III, A-10., states that "the pens shall be cleaned and the animals checked for food and water every 24 hours, minimally". This policy is not being followed. There is one day per week where no employee is scheduled to care for or feed the animals.
6. Dosages for euthanasia drugs are determined by animal weight. There is no scale to weigh the animals.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. Policies and procedures for accidental needle sticks and for animal euthanasia be developed and implemented immediately.
2. The Animal Control Department be removed from the Sheriff's Office supervision and moved to a more appropriate department.
3. The Department Head hold staff meetings a minimum of 4 times per year.
4. Staff coverage be sufficient to provide care for the kennel animals 2 times per day, 7 days per week.
5. A weight scale be acquired and that its use be implemented immediately.
6. An oversight committee be formed. Membership could include the head of the supervising department and volunteers from the community.