

CALL TO ACTION  
THE CASE FOR APPLYING POP/COPPS STRATEGIES TO THE PET  
OVERPOPULATION PROBLEM

by

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

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## CALL TO ACTION

## THE CASE FOR APPLYING POP/COPPS STRATEGIES TO THE PET OVERPOPULATION PROBLEM

The publishing of Herman Goldstein's 1991 book "Problem Oriented Policing"<sup>1</sup> arguably generated the most significant philosophical change in policing in the twentieth century. Problem Oriented Policing (POP) and later Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) are strategic plans that involve the analysis of crime, disorder, and public nuisance problems. The fundamental goal of both philosophies is for police agencies to address problems proactively rather than reactively.

"Community policing is a policing strategy and philosophy based on the notion that community interaction and support can help control crime and reduce fear, with community members helping to identify suspects, detain vandals and bring problems to the attention of police."<sup>2</sup> Most police agencies, when questioned about their policing philosophy, will answer that they practice either POP or COPPS. By 1999, State and local law enforcement agencies had nearly 113,000 community policing officers or their equivalents, compared to about 21,000 in 1997.<sup>3</sup>

POP/COPPS strategies have been widely credited for aiding in the lowering of crime rates across the nation. "Many police departments have experimented with this 'problem

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Goldstein, *Problem Oriented Policing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Committee on Law and Justice (2004). *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing*. National Academies Press. p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew J. Hickman and Brian A. Reaves, *Community Policing in Local Police Departments, 1997 and 1999* (: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, 2001), NCJ 184794.

oriented' approach, and the available evaluation research suggests that problem-oriented policing is effective in dealing with a wide range of crime problems, including thefts and burglary (Eck and Spelman, 1987), street level drug markets (Kennedy, 1993; Hope, 1994), and violent crime hot spots (Braga et al, 1999). Another example is in Boston, where an interagency working group crafted a problem-oriented strategy that has shown much promise in reducing a seemingly intractable problem – youth gun homicide.”<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, these successes have not transferred to pet overpopulation problems. Although police and sheriff's departments are often mandated to perform animal control functions, in many jurisdictions, animal services sections of law enforcement agencies have not been trained in the POP/COPPS philosophy. This results in little change in animal care policies; and a continuance of the traditional “catch and kill” approach of days past. If animal control agencies were aligned with emerging trends in POP/COPPS, could we save the lives of countless domestic and wild animals?

### **The History of Animal Control**

Cities and counties typically are mandated to operate shelters or pounds for animals that are either lost, unwanted, strays, or being held because they are vicious or dangerous. Historically, animal control, used barbaric methods to carry out their mandate. Council meeting minutes from a Northern California city dating as early as 1858 reflect an ordinance which required impounding any dog running at large without a collar on its neck. Twenty years later, a resolution was passed requiring the Chief of Police, who was the City's

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony A. Braga, *Problem-Oriented Policing and Crime Prevention* (New York: Criminal Justice Press, 2008).

‘Poundmaster,’ “to produce to the Finance Committee the scalps of each dog that he brings in the bill against the City for selling and burying.”<sup>5</sup>

The humane movement was born in an effort to change the way animal populations were treated and controlled, and to mitigate the issues relating to animal abuse. The humane movement, however, has changed in many ways since the founding in 1866 of the first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). Henry Bergh founded the organization in response to the way animals were treated in New York City. Cows, hogs, and sheep regularly were driven down city streets on the way to the slaughterhouses. Stray dogs and cats were routinely shot on sight, or placed in iron cages and drowned in an effort to rid cities of these unwanted, surplus animals.<sup>6</sup>

Sadly, the killing of surplus animals is still pervasive today, although the methods of killing surplus animals have changed over the years. In Penal Code Section 597w, California law stipulates that animals must be euthanized “humanely,” rather than by more barbaric methods such as decompression chambers. The law does not, however, address the toll of pet’s lives taken each year.

### **The Death Toll**

According to the Humane Society of the United States, 6-8 million dogs and cats enter our nation’s shelters each year. Of those animals, 3-4 million are killed because they are deemed surplus animals. A fertile cat can produce 3 litters of kittens per year, with 4-6 kittens in the average litter. A fertile dog can produce 2 litters per year, with 6-10 puppies in the

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<sup>5</sup> "City of Stockton City Council Minutes," *Held in Stockton, September 20, 1878*, (Stockton: 1878).

<sup>6</sup> Nathan J. Winograd, *Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America*. (Los Angeles: Almaden, 2007), 7.

average canine litter. Only 30 percent of dogs and 2-5 percent of cats entering shelters each year are reclaimed by their owners.<sup>7</sup> Even the fiscal aspects of the equation are staggering. In California, law enforcement agencies spend about a quarter of a **billion** dollars per year to euthanize animals.<sup>8</sup>

These numbers indicate this problem will not go away on its own. Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.<sup>9</sup> The catch and kill philosophy is archaic; there are proven solutions to the pet overpopulation problem, and the good news about having such a pervasive problem is that virtually every time one improves upon an existing strategy or procedure, lives are saved, thus contributing to the solution to the problem.

### **The Traditions of Animal Control**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most animal control and care agencies have not changed the philosophical manner in which they approach their animal control mandate. According to Ed Boks, General Manager of Los Angeles Animal Services, “Some community animal control programs did take notice of the greater value people were placing on their pets, and responded sooner, but most of us only began our aggressive adoption, spay/neuter, and feral cat

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<sup>7</sup> *Humane Society United States*, <http://hsus.org/pets/issuesaffectingourptes/> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> *Compassion In Social Legislation*, <http://www.cahealthypets.com/pdf/2008%20Two%20Rulers.pdf>. (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Albert Einstein, *Brainy Quote*, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins133991.html>. (accessed June 10, 2009).

management programs in the 1990s. Some animal control programs are still turning the corner on implementing some of these innovative life-and cost-saving programs.”<sup>10</sup>

Traditional animal control departments practice the catch and kill strategy, which entails the impounding of stray, unwanted, neglected, or vicious animals, holding them for a mandated period of time, and then euthanizing the surplus animals after a specified period of time.

Conversely, an emerging trend in animal services strategies focuses on population control through spaying and neutering of dogs and cats. The No Kill Advocacy Center (a nonprofit organization whose goal is to work toward ending the systematic killing of animals in shelters throughout the United States) notes that “In communities throughout the United States, rescue groups, animal lovers, good Samaritans and No Kill shelters are demanding change. Rejecting the failed notion that the best we can offer homeless animals is a ‘humane’ death and that shelters bear no culpability for the number of animals killed, these individuals and organizations are challenging the status quo. And calling for an end to the killing.”<sup>11</sup>

One must eventually ask the question, “Is there a ‘humane’ way to kill healthy social animals?” Some communities have succeeded in their quest to become “no kill” or low kill communities. Richard Avanzino, as Executive Director of the San Francisco ASPCA, brought all of the necessary ingredients together in San Francisco to become the first City and County in the nation to offer an adoption guarantee for every healthy shelter cat and dog in 1994.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ed Boks, "Animal Control: A Century in Review," *www.bestfriends.org*.

<sup>11</sup> *No Kill Advocacy Center*, November/December 2005, 2005, "Reforming Animal Control," *www.nokillsolutions.com/* (accessed June 20, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> *Maddie's Fund*, [http://www.maddiesfund.org/About\\_Us/Maddies\\_Fund\\_Team/Rich\\_Avanzino.html](http://www.maddiesfund.org/About_Us/Maddies_Fund_Team/Rich_Avanzino.html) (accessed June 24, 2009).

No kill shelters advocate that animals that are not vicious, and are healthy or unhealthy, but treatable, should be placed in adoptive homes or sanctuaries as opposed to being killed in shelters because of a lack of space to house them. To significantly lower their euthanasia rates, shelters must design programs to address a variety of issues regarding animals they have taken in. Programs and services from adoption to veterinary care to socialization and training must be created to address the needs of each individual animal and provide an alternative to euthanasia as a primary tool of population control.

### **An Alternate Approach**

The collection and housing of the animals by government agencies does not have to result in a death sentence for healthy animals. In some communities, non-profit organizations such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), have partnered with local government agencies to reduce euthanasia rates. Tragically, the rates of killing have not decreased in most communities. Each year, more than 800,000 dogs and cats are abandoned in California. About half of those animals are euthanized.<sup>13</sup> There are, however, strategies that can and should be implemented to reverse the trend of high euthanasia rates.

Some jurisdictions have changed their policies and procedures to drastically reduce their euthanasia rates. California jurisdictions such as Santa Cruz County, San Francisco, Simi Valley, and Oakland have decreasing euthanasia rates of healthy dogs and cats, while San Francisco, California and Calgary, Canada are among communities that have virtually achieved no kill status. Many more jurisdictions can modernize their animal care practices by merely applying contemporary policing philosophies to the problems of the animal control venue.

### **Strategies to Reverse the Euthanasia Trends**

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<sup>13</sup> "Spay Neuter Bill Merits Passage," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 9, 2007.

It is time to change the way we think about and handle the problem of dog and cat overpopulation. Law enforcement leaders need to address the facts of the pet overpopulation crisis and take a leadership role to implement proven, innovative approaches. While policing effectiveness is often measured by crime rates because they are quantifiable and easy to compare from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, animal control agencies' effectiveness could be measured by euthanasia rates, and the ability of the shelter to avoid the euthanasia of healthy or treatable animals. If euthanasia rates at most government animal shelters were viewed with as much scrutiny as crime rates, would citizens demand that agencies be held accountable and change their methods and procedures to mitigate the problem?

Pet overpopulation problem is a social issue, although it has practical fiscal implications as well. LAPD Chief Bill Bratton says, "Studies have shown that every dollar spent on spaying and neutering saves \$18.74 in future animal control costs over a ten year period."<sup>14</sup> From humane, moral, and fiscal perspectives, reducing the numbers of dogs and cats euthanized by California law enforcement agencies is the right thing to do. If one addresses the facts of pet overpopulation, it is clear that there are solutions to this problem.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to reverse the trend of continually rising euthanasia rates. If police and sheriff's departments apply the concepts of POP/COPPS to the trends of pet overpopulation and high euthanasia rates, more emphasis can be placed in finding solutions to the core problems of killing healthy and treatable animals. Addressing the causes of the pet overpopulation problem can result in reduced rates.

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<sup>14</sup> *Compassion In Social Legislation*, <http://www.cahealthypets.com/ca-healthy-pets-ab-1634-fact-sheets-php>.

POP/COPPS strategies such as responding proactively rather than reactively are applicable to the animal control mandate. If we take an honest, hard look at the way animal control agencies conduct their business, there has been very little attention paid to problem solving. The POP/COPPS philosophy requires community involvement in the problem solving process. This can be accomplished by something as simple as educating pet owners about spay and neuter.

### **1-Educate**

The challenge of lowering the euthanasia rates of dogs and cats by law enforcement has been neglected by law enforcement agencies and society in general. Community members and locally elected officials tend to turn their heads and avoid the problem. When most people call animal services agencies or turn an animal over to an “Animal Shelter” they do not realize the fate that the animal will likely meet. It is Animal Control’s responsibility and role to spread the message about the realities of euthanasia rates throughout the nation.

Education of the community through media campaigns, partnerships with schools, giving presentations at community groups, and advertising are all ways to publicize the issue of high euthanasia rates at our shelters. The City of Calgary, Canada has a successful education program and a staff member committed full time to humane education programs for the community and also grade appropriate education for students. Tracy Gauson of Calgary Animal Services was hired exclusively to wage their animal services educational campaign. It is her job to win the hearts and minds of the people of the city and convince them that licensing their dogs is the right thing to do. And so far, it seems to be working. More than 90 percent of dogs living in Calgary today are licensed. “You’re never going to get them all, she says. But

we're working on it.”<sup>15</sup> We must challenge communities and agencies to change their attitudes and work toward lowering euthanasia rates as Calgary has.

## **2-Work Toward Making Sterilization Services Available to Community Members of all Income Levels**

The population of dogs and cats must be stabilized through birth control rather than euthanasia. There is research currently being conducted to develop a non-surgical method of birth control for dogs and cats; however, this technology is not currently available and there is no accurate estimation as to when it will become available.

Spaying and neutering of unsterilized animals **is the solution** to the pet overpopulation problem. Because this is a surgical procedure, cost becomes a factor when developing affordable spay/neuter programs. Many community members, already suffering from difficult economic times, do not have the discretionary income to have their animals sterilized by private veterinarians.

Shelters and non-profit groups have a number of ways to raise money to operate spay and neuter programs. A simple Internet search can reveal opportunities for grant funding in animal sheltering and rescue. In California, the Food and Agriculture Code, Division 14, Chapter 1.5, requires animal shelters, adoption groups and humane non-profit groups collect a deposit of between \$40-75 for every dog that is released that has not been spayed or neutered. The law requires sterilization within 30 days of release unless the animal is too young, too old or too sick to perform the procedure. The deposit is forfeited if the dog is not altered within 30

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<sup>15</sup> *Petfinder.com*, <http://www.petfinder.com/how-to-help-pets/calgarys-animal-laws-win-gold.html> (accessed June 29, 2009).

days of being deemed healthy by a veterinarian, or of its release. The section further requires that forfeited funds only be expended on programs to spay or neuter dogs and cats.<sup>16</sup>

Some communities have pursued differential licensing fees as a method of generating revenue for spay and neuter programs. This means that licensing an intact dog or cat is significantly more expensive than licensing a sterilized dog or cat, for example, \$100 versus \$10. The \$90 differential is mandated to go toward operating spay and neuter programs. Traditional fundraising by non-profit groups, too, can assist in efforts to fund spay and neuter programs.

### **3- Form Law Enforcement/Volunteer Community Partnerships**

The inherent problem with the first two recommendations is that law enforcement animal services departments are typically overworked and understaffed, so the question is how to implement these recommendations when the employees are burdened by calls for service and running the shelters.

Communities throughout California are turning to volunteers to address a variety of local government issues. According to Mark J. Penn, sixty-three percent of American households have pets, up from 56 percent in 1988. That's 44 million households with at least one dog, and 38 million households with at least one cat. The top 1 percent of pets live better than 99 percent of the world's population. In 2006, Americans spent \$40 billion on their pets. They spent an additional \$9 billion on over-the-counter medical treatments and supplies.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *DogLaw.hugpug.com*, <http://doglaw.hugpug.com/law/california/30520-30525.html> (accessed July 1, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Mark J. Penn and E. Kinney Zalesne, *Microtrends* (New York: Hachette Book Group USA, 2007), 107-109.

Americans love dogs and cats, and encouraging volunteerism is an attempt to tap into this love for animals.

Government/non-profit partnerships have proven effective at addressing and solving the pet overpopulation problem in a number of communities by utilizing citizen volunteers. Volunteers can assist in an infinite number of ways. For example, they can assist with fund raising, grant writing, managing feral cat colonies through Trap/Neuter/Return programs, working in shelters and clinics to groom, socialize and exercise animals, assisting with medical procedures in spay/neuter clinics, and assisting with off-site pet adoption events. Many animal owners would be willing to work toward solving the pet overpopulation problem if they were aware of the extent of the problem.

#### **4-Practice or Advocate Trap/Neuter/Return (T/N/R) as a Method to Stabilize Feral Cat Populations**

About 70% of the cats killed at animal shelters are feral cats.<sup>18</sup> Feral cats generally fall into two categories: 1) they are born outside and have never lived with humans, or 2) they are companion cats that have strayed from home and over time have become unsocialized to humans.

Most communities have a number of thriving feral cat colonies. Cats choose to reside in locations for two reasons: there is a food source (intended or not) and shelter. The typical Government strategy for handling these colonies is to trap the cats when a complaint is received and kill the unsocialized cats. There are a number of problems with this strategy and statistics prove they will not eliminate or even reduce the population of these colonies. When

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<sup>18</sup> *Alley Cat Allies*, "What We Do," <http://alleycat.org/> (accessed August 16, 2008).

cats are removed from a location and killed, survivors breed to capacity or new cats move in. This “vacuum effect” is well documented.

The key to reduce or maintain the populations of cat colonies is to utilize volunteers to assist in efforts to manage the colonies. These efforts include trapping the cats, spaying or neutering them, notching their ears for identification, and returning them to the colony to live *without* reproducing. This practice, known as Trap/Neuter/Return, works because there are no more kittens added to the colony. Eventually, the numbers of cats in these managed colonies dwindle (unless more unaltered cats and kittens are dumped at the sites) or are eliminated altogether.

Project Bay Cats is a good example of a T/N/R success story. Since 2003, a group of volunteers began a T/N/R program in Foster City, California along the Bay Trail, which also is home to a sensitive bird environment. The group worked with the approval of Sequoia Audubon Society to stabilize and feed the feral cat population. Once feeding stations were set up and monitored, the cats no longer had a need to hunt the birds for sustenance. In just over two years, the group was successful in not only stabilizing the population of the feral cat colony, but reducing the numbers through natural attrition and removing kittens and tame cats for adoption into permanent homes. Over the first two year period of the project, the feral cat population was down 20% to about 133 cats.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Homeless Cats Network*,  
[http://www.workpad.com/index\\_item.aspx?ObjectID=12879](http://www.workpad.com/index_item.aspx?ObjectID=12879) (accessed June 29, 2009).

## Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi said, “The greatness of a nation, and its moral progress, can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”<sup>20</sup> In the vast majority of California law enforcement agencies animal control is accomplished by practicing the catch and kill strategy as a way to reduce animal populations.

Legislation, education and adoption strategies, while helpful and necessary components of a well rounded strategic plan, are not enough to solve the problem of high euthanasia rates. There is a solution to the pet overpopulation problem, and that solution is *birth control through spaying and neutering*.

There is much work left to be done to accomplish the goal of eliminating the euthanasia of healthy animals. Responsible citizens and the government, including police and sheriff’s departments, have a social and moral responsibility to end the unnecessary killing of healthy animals. The fact that this goal has been accomplished in some communities proves that it is realistic and attainable. The key is strong leadership, proper planning and implementation of a strategic plan.

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<sup>20</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *Think Exist.com*, [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the\\_greatness\\_of\\_a\\_nation\\_and\\_its\\_moral\\_progress/189870html/](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the_greatness_of_a_nation_and_its_moral_progress/189870html/) (accessed June 10, 2009).

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