



**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE  
 “SL COUNTY RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP INITIATIVE”  
 AND RECENT ORDINANCE CHANGES**

**Background**

The past three years have seen a tremendous amount of change in the philosophy and daily operations of Salt Lake County Animal Services (“SLCoAS”). We have managed to launch new programs and services for the community, achieve record setting pet saved rates (euthanasia rates now less than half of the County/State) and receive national recognition for progress all during some of the most difficult economic times in recent history.

We’ve achieved these results through a focus on efficiency and a dedication to continued improvement and the pursuit of proactive rather than reactive solutions to issues. In the Fall of 2010 SLCoAS management began studying the "Calgary Animal Control Model" and the outstanding results that Calgary has achieved in terms of creating a safe, humane and pet friendly community.

The statistics below clearly outline how much opportunity there is for Salt Lake County communities to improve in these measures:

Measure	SLCoAS Jurisdictions	Calgary
Licensing Compliance – Dogs	22%	<b>90%</b>
Licensing Compliance – Cats	(Not Required)	<b>54%*</b>
Dogs Reunited with Owners	44%	<b>87%</b>
Cats Reunited with Owners	4%	<b>55%</b>
Dog Bites	658 / 381,000 residents**	<b>58 / 1,100,000 residents</b>

\*Cat licensing has only been in place for 3 years.

To achieve results similar to Calgary, SLCoAS will need to make changes in philosophy and daily operations as well as adopt ordinance changes. A core element of the Calgary approach to animal control is the premise that we don't have a pet overpopulation, stray animal, nuisance or vicious animal problem - we have an irresponsible pet ownership problem. To address this ‘people problem’ we need to be focused on education and communication with a goal of compliance to improve the lives of both people and pets in the community.

Animal control officers would need to begin focusing on mediation and education instead of traditional enforcement with goals set around identifying solutions that don't end in enforcement (citations).

This ‘new approach’ to animal control side of the agency’s duties is a logical and extremely progressive next step in creating a culture of responsible pet ownership that will result in a safer, more humane and much more pet friendly community.



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The three ordinance changes that have been adopted are:

1. Elimination of pet limits
2. Mandatory cat licensing
3. Increasing the penalty for no license to up to \$250/per violation

### **Q: Who will this legislation affect?**

A: Only residents of the unincorporated areas of Salt Lake County are affected by these ordinance changes. These are citizens in the canyon areas, Kearns, Copperton, Magna, Millcreek, and Sandy Islands as well as any other land in the valley not located inside of an incorporated city. Each city in the valley has its own ordinances and regulations that its citizens must abide by.

### **Q: Why are we eliminating the limits on pets?**

A: Pet limits impose an arguably arbitrary limit on the number of dogs and cats that a person can own. The goal of imposing limits supposedly is to address noise, odor or care issues. However, noise, odor and care issues are complaints that our agency deals with daily for citizens that only have one or two pets. If we cannot get a citizen to voluntarily address the issue through education then we have other ordinances that deal directly with noise, odor and care issues that we can utilize.

In addition, people don't give up their pets simply because there are pet limit ordinances in place. People are often deeply attached to their pets or feel responsible for a pet through extenuating circumstances. There are many reasons that a person may have more pets than a local ordinance allows. For example, a marriage where both individuals had pets before they married, friends and family taking responsibility for pets of loved ones that have passed away or for someone that has been deployed for military duty. We hear from citizens regularly that want to be in compliance with the licensing laws but cannot, not because of any actual issue or problems, but simply because they are 'over the limit'.

Limits don't address the actual problems but they do create a barrier to licensing compliance because citizens can't legally comply. In addition, because people that have extra pets often want to avoid Animal Services out of fear that they will lose their pets, they often don't license any of their pets.

### **Q. Won't eliminating pet limits encourage hoarding?**

A. Hoarding is a unique problem that exists whether or not there are pet limits in place. Pet limits will not stop someone that is compelled to hoard pets. As with all other situations, we will continue to deal with the actual issues and in the case of true hoarding, those issues usually involve problems with noise, odor and the level of care given to the pets.

### **Q: Why should I license my cat?**

A: Approximately 16,000 cats will enter shelters in the Salt Lake Valley each year and only 3%- 4% are successfully reunited with owners. We have worked very hard to change the fate of the animals that enter the county shelter but so few cats going home puts enormous burden on our programs. We don't believe that a 4% return to owner rate on the 4,000 to 5,000 cats that we care for each year represents success and we believe that together we can do a better job at getting these cats home.



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There are many reasons to license a family pet. The same reasons that apply to dogs and ferrets apply to as well to cats:

A license enables us to find you and bring your pet home. Dog licensing has been required for a many years and we are able to return a significant percentage of dogs to their owners within a few days. We also have goals set around driving more pets home rather than bringing them to the shelter, however, without licensing information, your pet cat cannot benefit from this initiative.

- a. A license indicates to animal control agencies that an animal has an owner who is looking for it. If we find your pet injured, perhaps hit by a car, a license ensures that we will seek prompt medical attention for your furry family member.
- b. Part of the licensing process is confirming that rabies vaccinations are up to date. Rabies is a deadly but preventable disease and ensuring that all pets are properly vaccinated is in the best interest of the community.
- c. To reunite pets with their owners, we have to first determine who the owners are. Cats in particular are quite adept at escaping collars and other methods of identification. The best chance of properly identifying your animal is obtained through the use of microchipping. A microchip is a permanent method of identification for your animal. As part of this initiative we are offering FREE microchips with your license to ensure that your pet can take advantage of this amazing identification system. A microchip plus a license virtually guarantees that your lost pet, if found, will be returned to you.
- d. It is the law.

**Q: Why make cat licensing mandatory?**

A: Cat licensing has been available on a voluntary basis for many years. In that time, very few cats have been licensed and consequently very few ever find their way back home. In Salt Lake County, we are currently only able to reunite around 3-4% of all lost cats with their owners. Dogs, which are more likely licensed, are 10 times more likely to find their way home.

**Q: What about the outdoor cats I am feeding but don't actually own?**

A: Cats that are free roaming, wild, or untamed are considered “Feral Cats” (or “community cats”) and are not considered owned. For these community cats, licensing is strongly encouraged but not required. If they have any access into your home then we consider them owned and they will need to be licensed.

If you are feeding cats please obtain a colony permit (no charge) and take advantage of the information and resources to ensure all colony cats are sterilized and vaccinated.

**Q: Can I license “Feral” (“Community”) cats?**

A: We are supportive of community cat programs and work very closely with the community and rescue groups on Trap/Neuter/Return initiatives including providing resources and education. While it isn't required, we strongly encourage the licensing of these cats since they would then also benefit from being returned directly to their neighborhood instead of coming to the shelter.



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**Q. I am over the limit on the number of pets but I'm a good owner and have never had any complaints. Are the new ordinances a way for the County to try and make me give up my pets?**

Absolutely not. As part of this initiative we are also proposing that pet limits be eliminated under the premise that limits don't solve the problems but that they are a barrier to compliance since people then have to 'hide' from our agency. Since this proposal went public we've heard from many citizens (almost all anonymous, of course) that have stated they can't wait to come into compliance. We have other ordinances and tools to address issues around noise, odor or quality of care and we will continue to utilize those as we work with citizens.

**Q. Penalty fees of up to \$250 seem high. Why is this necessary?**

A: Licensing compliance is only 22%, which means we are also only ensuring rabies compliance for 22% of our pet population. In addition, of that 22%, approximately 25% of licensee's do not renew their license the following year. That figure does not include cases where we have been notified that the pet has passed away, been given away or the owner no longer lives in our area. This means that a significant amount of time is spent trying to make repeat contact with citizens that are already aware of the requirement to license but simply choose not to comply. We feel that our time is much better spent on proactive endeavors like driving pets directly home, providing resources and educating about responsible pet ownership.

First interactions will be to educate the pet owner about their responsibilities and everyone will have one opportunity to have the penalty waived once. However, once we have educated the individual about their responsibilities we expect citizens to follow through. The next encounter will involve a penalty of \$125 and subsequent violations will carry a penalty of \$250.

**Q: What is Animal Service's definition of responsible pet ownership?**

A: The Five Principles of Responsible Pet Ownership are:

1. License and provide permanent identification for pets (dogs, ferrets **and** cats).
2. Unless the pet is part of a responsible breeding program, spay or neuter all pets.
3. Provide socialization, training and proper and ongoing medical care for pets.
4. Do not allow a pet to become a nuisance or a threat to the community.
5. Only procure pets from responsible and ethical sources.

If we everyone would abide by these five principles, problems with pets in our community would disappear.