

This Chapter Covers:

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- ◆ **Personnel Relations**
- ◆ **Related Agencies**
- ◆ **Texas Animal Health Commission –
Emergency Management Planning**

Public Relations

Public relations is the business of creating goodwill and understanding between animal control and the public. The public generally has a negative attitude toward animal control. Therefore, contacts between you and some members of the public could become unpleasant and even violent. As a professional animal control officer (ACO), **you** can change the public's attitude for the better.

- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Show interest in every citizen, and treat every problem as important.
- Stay in control and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Communication Skills (Basic)

Citizen Contact

Citizens form a first impression of you based on what they see. You want that impression to be a good one.

- Stay clean and neat. Good personal hygiene is a must. It helps to "freshen-up" between calls. Keep a clean shirt in your vehicle or shelter.
- Keep clothing neat, clean, and wrinkle-free, at least as much as the job allows.
- Keep your vehicle clean.
- Do not walk too fast or shuffle your feet.
- Stand straight, but appear relaxed.

People may already be nervous about an official visit from an ACO. Try to get them to relax. Your body language and communication skills will help. Display an attitude of calm authority in a pleasant, impartial manner. This will put the other person at ease.

- Keep four to six feet between you and the other person at all times. Entering someone's personal space (standing closer than four feet away from them) can increase the tension. This is also a safe distance for you if they become violent.
- **Face the citizen** during a conversation, but **angle** your body slightly to the side. Standing face-to-face may make the citizen feel uncomfortable.
- Make **eye contact** during the conversation, but do not stare.
- **Smile** when the situation allows.

Communication Skills (Basic)

- Do **not** enter a person's home (even if invited to do so) unless it is the **only** way to achieve the objective of your visit.

Look and stay calm no matter what the other person says or does. You will get a more favorable response if you look calm than if you appear or sound angry.

- Always **maintain control**. Do not engage in a shouting match. Losing your temper could result in a loss of respect for you and your agency and may lead to violence.
- Strive to achieve two things:
 - * accomplish the objective of the visit; and
 - * leave the citizen with a good impression of animal control.

Keep your voice low and speak at a normal pace when talking to the other person. Soothing tones can have a calming effect on people, just as they can on animals.

- Identify yourself first. Give your full name and position.
- Explain the specific problem that has resulted in the visit.
- Discuss your duties and responsibilities as an ACO. Make the person aware that you are there for their safety and the safety of their pets.
- Let the person present their side of the story and listen attentively. This shows that you are willing to listen and that you are not just there to blame someone.
- Ask for their help. If you make them feel like they play a part in the solution, they are less likely to cause problems in the future.

Communication Skills (Basic)

Speak clearly and intelligently. **Know your job and the laws**, but do not be afraid to say "I do not know."

Conclude the meeting the way it began with courtesy and understanding. Thank the person for their time, even if they did not cooperate.

Remember: If a person becomes threatening, quit talking to them and leave.

- The capture of an animal or the issuance of a citation is not worth an injury to you.
- Most citizens will "calm down" with time. You can talk to them again later if you do not accomplish your goal on the first visit.

Call your agency for assistance if the situation is dangerous. In extreme situations, ask for help from law enforcement.

An attack on an officer on duty must result in civil and/or criminal charges being filed. The ACO's supervisor needs to make sure this process is completed. These situations do not happen often, but it is extremely important that they be taken seriously.

Personnel Relations

Animal control officers and their supervisors need to respect and support each other. Your supervisor needs to explain agency policies to you. You must refer to these policies and your supervisor's decisions. Ask for an explanation if a policy is unclear or you do not understand why a decision was made. Ask your supervisor privately and be respectful. Keep your supervisor informed of your activities. Tell your supervisor about problems you had while on duty.

Communication Skills (Basic)

- If a citizen threatens to complain or call a city or county official, be sure you inform your supervisor about it right away.
- Supervisors find it hard to support their staff if they do not know what has happened or if they are surprised by a complaint.

Related Agencies

Animal control and humane agencies need each other.

- In the past, these agencies were viewed as having very different goals. Conflicts kept them from forming a good working relationship.
- Today, both agencies are considered more professional and share many of the same goals. Each agency can help toward the goals of the other.

Many other **private** and **government agencies** have functions related to animal control.

- Some examples of these agencies include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Department, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Animal Health Commission, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and city, county, and state health departments.
- Cooperative efforts between agencies are sometimes the best way to get a job done.
- It is important to talk with people from these agencies. Do not wait for an emergency to do this. It is easier to meet people and to become familiar with their job duties beforehand; then, in an emergency situation, each group will know what to do and what to expect from each other.

Communication Skills (Basic)

Texas Animal Health Commission - Emergency Management Planning

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) is the state's livestock health regulatory agency and the lead coordinating agency for all animal-in-disaster issues on the state's Emergency Management Council. The TAHC partners with a wide variety of local, state, and national agencies and organizations to prepare for and respond to disasters. This includes disease-related incidents (such as the introduction of a foreign animal disease, a dangerous tick, or other pest) or an attack by bioterrorists, as well as response and recovery during man-made or natural catastrophes, including floods and hurricanes.

The TAHC staff primarily assists in man-made or natural disaster responses in accordance with the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) Emergency Response Plan and/or the State of Texas Emergency Plan in the following areas:

- Animal ownership identification
- Livestock restraint/capture
- Carcass disposal
- Coordinating livestock evacuation
- Consulting on animal health and public health concerns
- Chemical/biological terrorism issues

The TAHC also prepares for emergency situations involving companion animals through partnerships and has a variety of resources to help communities prepare for all hazards as they may affect animals. As an ACO, you may be called upon to assist your local community in the planning process. The TAHC is available to assist you with your local planning needs. The TAHC can be contacted at:

Emergency Management Coordinator - Texas Animal Health Commission

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