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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT RECLAIMING STRAY ANIMALS

### **What if my shelter is closed when I go to reclaim my animal?**

Wisconsin law requires that if any legal deadline expires on a Sunday, it extends to Monday. Moreover, most animal control facilities are open at least one weekend day in order to reclaim your lost pet. Many are open 6 – 7 days per week and have early morning and evening hours. If you believe your pet is at your local impound facility and you work during all available reclaim hours, shelters are usually happy to let another authorized party reclaim on your behalf, or help make other arrangements for you to be reunited with your animal.

### **My animal has a microchip; what if my local shelter can't read it?**

Few if any animal control providers in Wisconsin would lack access to a viable microchip reader. In fact, many police departments have them on hand for use in the field. Most veterinary clinics can also check chips. To further ensure the safety of your microchipped animal:

- Don't forget to update microchip information when you move or change a phone number, or if you transfer the animal to another owner.
- Use a tag in addition to a microchip. Even microchipped animals should not be without a collar with an I.D. tag on with CURRENT owner information. This often eliminates the need for a trip to animal control (and the associated fees) at all, since – unlike a microchip -- anyone can read a tag and take the animal home.

### **What if I can't get to my local shelter and they don't post pictures of stray animals?**

It's true that not every stray facility posts pictures of stray animals – but even where they do, a personal visit is by far the best way to identify your animal. Even the most loving owner would have trouble telling her black cat's photo apart from 20 others. Ultimately, the law requires owners to come into a facility in person to visually identify their companion to begin the reclaim process, and the best practice is to do that every day or every other day.

### **Is there a centralized database to report or look for lost or found stray pets in Wisconsin?**

There is currently not a centralized statewide database, nor are there a legal requirement to have one, or funding to create and to maintain one. Owners of animals who live near city or county boundaries will always be advised to contact multiple municipalities in case the animal crossed over, or was picked up and brought to another municipality. A database containing all stray animals from Milwaukee to Ashland would be difficult at best – imagine trying to find a black cat among hundreds, for example, or searching across different dog breed identifications in different cities. Even if such a database did exist someday, physically going to your local animal impound facility will always be the best way to see if an animal is there.

### **Will stray hold facilities let me know they have my dog or cat?**

If your animal has a current license, microchip or ID tag, every impound facility will absolutely contact you. In fact, Wisconsin law requires impound facilities to notify a known owner in writing that an animal is in custody and the procedure for reclaiming the animal. If there is expired or incomplete identification information on your animal, the shelter will still typically do online searches for additional contact information, and try to contact you via email or other social media if they have those resources available. Of course, these efforts do not replace the owner's obligation to reach out to the local stray hold facility when an animal is lost.

### **Why are the fees to reclaim my animal so high?**

There are some fees that a stray hold facility is required to collect by law, such as fees for local ordinances and current license and rabies vaccines. (State law requires that no animal can be returned to an owner from stray hold without a current license and rabies vaccine.) Other fees such as impound fees (which vary from facility to facility) cover the pick-up of an animal, intake vaccinations, usually a general deworming. Some facilities charge boarding fees per day, usually \$15 – \$20. The sooner you reclaim your animal, the fewer fees you will have to pay. Certainly, if your animal arrives at a shelter and you are notified that the animal is there, you should pick it up that day.

Facilities recognize that many families with lost animals have financial constraints. Often, visiting a shelter in person to reclaim can start a dialogue about those constraints, and lead to reduced or waived fees. Remember, shelters want animals to go to their home as soon as possible. At the same time, many facilities cannot operate if their costs are not reimbursed. The law permits facilities to charge reasonable fees, and most stray hold facilities spend an average of \$30 per day for each animal in their care, sometimes more. Often these costs are not fully reimbursed by the municipalities who contract with shelters to hold stray animals.

To reduce reclaim costs if your animal becomes stray, keep your animal licensed and up to date on the rabies vaccine, and pick the animal up as soon as you learn it is at the facility.

### **What if I have a language barrier, or have other disabilities that prevent me from reclaiming my animal?**

Shelters try to do what they can to help owners with challenges of any type get the help they need to reclaim their animals. No shelter wants to keep a family from being reunited. That said, it is up to an owner to ask for help by calling or visiting the impound facility. Certainly, if there is a language barrier, a visit to the impound facility in person can help bridge the gap.

There are also resources for those with transportation challenges available through other government agencies including agencies that deal with physically or mentally challenged residents, elderly residents and other help that are usually already being provided to an owner. Often just making a phone call to that agency or the impound facility can facilitate the appropriate help to get an animal back home.

**What records are impound facilities required to keep?**

Impound facilities have a legal obligation to keep the following records:

- (1) A physical description of the animal.
- (2) The date that custody was taken of the animal, the date that the animal was delivered into the possession of another person and the identity of the person to whom delivered.
- (3) The reason for taking custody of the animal.
- (4) The ultimate disposition of the animal, including the name and address of any person into whose custody the animal was ultimately released.

If euthanasia was the outcome, the DEA requires that the drug be logged for each use, including the type and amount of the drugs used, the date used and species of animal. Additionally, the State of Wisconsin Licensing Board requires this same information be supplied annually for a license to keep euthanasia drugs and use them for animals where humane euthanasia is the best option due to illness, injury or behavioral reasons.