

Animal Control

807.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for interacting with animals and responding to calls for service that involve animals.

807.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Rockbridge County Sheriff's Office to be responsive to the needs of the community regarding animal-related issues. This includes enforcing local, state and federal laws relating to animals and appropriately resolving or referring animal-related problems, as outlined in this policy.

Deputies shall enforce laws relating to animals to the same extent that other laws in the Commonwealth of Virginia are enforced (Va. Code § 3.2-6567).

807.3 SPECIAL ENFORCEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Animal control services are generally the primary responsibility of Special Enforcement and include the following:

- (a) Animal-related matters during periods when Special Enforcement is available.
- (b) Ongoing or persistent animal nuisance complaints. Such complaints may be scheduled, if reasonable, for handling during periods that Special Enforcement is available for investigation and resolution.
- (c) Follow-up on animal-related calls, such as locating owners of injured animals.

807.4 MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Members who respond to or assist with animal-related calls for service should evaluate the situation to determine appropriate actions to control the situation.

Due to the hazards of handling animals without proper training and equipment, responding members generally should not attempt to capture or pick up any animal, but should keep the animal under observation until the arrival of appropriate assistance.

Members may consider acting before the arrival of such assistance when:

- (a) There is a threat to public safety.
- (b) An animal has bitten someone. Members should take measures to confine the animal and prevent further injury.
- (c) An animal is creating a traffic hazard.
- (d) An animal is seriously injured.
- (e) The owner/handler of an animal has been arrested or is incapacitated. In such circumstances, the member should find appropriate placement for the animal.

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1. This is only necessary when the arrestee is expected to be in custody for a time period longer than would reasonably allow him/her to properly care for the animal.
 2. With the owner's consent, locating appropriate placement may require contacting relatives or neighbors to care for the animal.
 3. If no person can be found or the owner does not or cannot give consent, the animal should be taken to a designated animal care facility.
- (f) A dangerous or vicious dog is found in violation of Va. Code § 3.2-6540 or Va. Code § 3.2-6540.1.

807.4.1 STATE REQUIREMENTS

Members taking custody of a dog or a cat shall ask whether, if known, the animal has bitten a person or other animal, and the date and circumstances of such bite. Members shall document the information in the report of the incident.

Members who subsequently release the animal for adoption, return to rightful owner, or transfer to another agency shall disclose that the animal has bitten a person or other animal and the circumstances and date of such bite (Va. Code § 3.2-6509.1).

807.5 ANIMAL CRUELTY COMPLAINTS

Laws relating to the cruelty to animals should be enforced including, but not limited to:

- (a) Care of companion animals by owner (Va. Code § 3.2-6503).
- (b) Care of agricultural animals by owner (Va. Code § 3.2-6503.1).
- (c) Abandonment of animal (Va. Code § 3.2-6504).
- (d) Cruelty to animals (Va. Code § 3.2-6570 et seq.).
- (e) Control of dangerous dogs (Va. Code § 3.2-6540).
- (f) Control of vicious dogs (Va. Code § 3.2-6540.1).

Members should conduct an investigation on all reports of animal cruelty. Legal steps should be taken to protect an animal that is in need of immediate care or protection from acts of cruelty (Va. Code § 3.2-6564).

807.6 ANIMAL BITE REPORTS

Members investigating an animal bite should obtain as much information as possible for follow-up with the appropriate health or animal authorities. Efforts should be made to capture or otherwise have the animal placed under control. Members should attempt to identify and notify the owner of the final disposition of the animal.

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807.7 STRAY DOGS

If the dog has a license or can otherwise be identified, the owner should be contacted, if possible. If the owner is contacted, the dog should be released to the owner and a citation may be issued, if appropriate. If a dog is taken into custody, it shall be transported to the appropriate shelter/holding pen.

Members shall provide reasonable treatment to animals in their care (e.g., food, water, shelter).

807.8 DANGEROUS ANIMALS

In the event responding members cannot fulfill a request for service because an animal is difficult or dangerous to handle, the Supervisor will be contacted to determine available resources, including requesting the assistance of animal control services from an allied agency.

807.9 PUBLIC NUISANCE CALLS RELATING TO ANIMALS

Members should diligently address calls related to nuisance animals (e.g., barking dogs), because such calls may involve significant quality-of-life issues.

807.10 DECEASED ANIMALS

When a member becomes aware of a deceased animal, all reasonable attempts should be made to preliminarily determine if the death of the animal is related to criminal activity.

Deceased animals on public property should be removed, sealed in a plastic bag and properly disposed of by the responding member.

Members should not climb onto or under any privately owned structure for the purpose of removing a deceased animal.

807.11 INJURED ANIMALS

When a member becomes aware of an injured domesticated animal, all reasonable attempts should be made to contact an owner or responsible handler. If an owner or responsible handler cannot be located, the animal should be taken to a designated animal care facility.

807.11.1 VETERINARY CARE

When the owner or responsible handler cannot be located and the animal is not an immediate danger to the community, it shall be taken to a designated animal care facility to determine if veterinarian care is needed as described below:

Members are authorized to impound and take any animal to a veterinarian when the animal (Va. Code § 3.2-6569):

- (a) Has been abandoned.
- (b) Has been cruelly treated.
- (c) Is suffering a direct and immediate threat to its life, safety or health.

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Prior to seizing or impounding any agricultural animal, members shall contact the State Veterinarian who shall recommend the most appropriate action for effecting the seizure or impoundment (Va. Code § 3.2-6569).

807.12 DESTRUCTION OF ANIMALS

When it is necessary to use a firearm to euthanize a badly injured animal or stop an animal that poses an imminent threat to human safety, the Firearms Policy shall be followed.

When practicable, the assistance of a humane investigator should be obtained to handle the euthanasia of an animal (Va. Code § 3.2-6558; Va. Code § 3.2-6563).

Special Enforcement or deputies may kill a dog that is in the act of killing or injuring livestock or poultry (Va. Code § 3.2-6552).

807.13 REPORTS

Members who take an animal into custody should generate a complete report of the incident, including a description of the animal (species, color, breed, sex, approximate age and weight, and temperament), the reason the animal was taken into custody, the animal's home address, if known, and any identification number, tag information or other identification on the animal (Va. Code § 3.2-6557).

The Sheriff or the authorized designee should ensure that this policy and any animal intake procedures are filed annually with the State Veterinarian's Office (Va. Code § 3.2-6557).