

Pacific Animal Foundation

www.PacificAnimal.org

Cat Licensing

Some interesting points to consider from an article written by the San Francisco SPCA. (copyright 2000 – The San Francisco SPCA – “Cat Advocacy” – www.sfspca.org)

“Legislation that looks harmless, or even helpful, can actually have negative consequences for animals.

- Pet limit laws, anti-feeding ordinances, cat licensing, feral cat “ownership” laws, cat colony registration, mandatory spay/neuter, cat confinement laws and “nuisance” laws can – and have been – used to target cats and their caregivers.

- The costs of passing coercive, punitive mandates are high. Communities that take this approach may not see substantial decreases in dog and cat deaths, and, in some cases, these deaths may actually increase. And adopting these measures can drive a deep, sometimes irreparable, wedge between the community and the shelter.

- Legislation is often thought of as a quick solution to pet overpopulation. “If only we had a law,” the argument goes, “all the bad, irresponsible people out there would take care of their pets properly, and shelters wouldn’t have to kill so many animals.” But experience has proved that legislation is not the cure-all many have sought. In fact it can have the opposite effect.”

Pacific Animal Foundation recently sent an email to all Mayors and Councils in British Columbia to give them some helpful information on feral cats, the practice called Trap/Neuter/Return (or “TNR”) and cat licensing in order to assist them in making decisions for their communities.

The following excerpt is from our email. You can read the entire email on our website at www.pacificanimal.org

Cat licensing is not a new concept. As far back as the early and mid -1990’s, the idea was receiving attention. Several jurisdictions in the U.S. even enacted licensing programs against the advice of several prominent groups of animal organizations who cautioned against it. A number of those jurisdictions have repealed their legislation citing various reasons for rescinding the law. Toronto, Ontario is now the latest jurisdiction to contemplate ending their failing pet licensing legislation.

Council should be aware of the negative consequences of cat licensing legislation.

- 1) people may not seek veterinary care for their animal fearing a fine or impoundment fee if found to have no licence for their animal;

- 2) community feral cats risk being trapped and killed, resulting in increased killing costs and numbers for a municipality. At the very least, feral caregivers may not initiate Trap/Neuter/Return (“TNR”) programs for their local cats fearing impoundment and/or killing of the cats. The cats then continue to reproduce which is counter-productive to reducing the new litters of street kittens; and

- 3) in a large urban environment such as Vancouver, many municipalities share common borders. Cats do not respect jurisdictional boundaries when wandering, so would pet owners living close to municipal boundaries be required to pay licence fees in more than one municipality? What if one municipality adopts licensing but the neighbouring one does not? When an annual licence expires is the record of the animal expunged? A lot of expensive bureaucratic paperwork will be needed in order to keep up with constant record keeping.

If the major aim of cat licensing is to reunite lost pets with owners, then likely technology will be that answer. Licensing may only work if the cat is actually found. It can’t track a lost cat but technology has moved forward at a tremendous pace and there are pet tracking devices already available in the marketplace. A simple google search has turned up several. It’s likely only a matter of time before pet tracking devices are mass marketed. RFID chips



Feral and at riskbecause she has no owner to pay her license fee.

are already used for microchipping dogs and cats for identification purposes once an animal is found. RFID tracking chips embedded in collars will allow us to track our pets. From a municipal point of view, instead of licensing, it may be best to encourage pet owners to either microchip or tattoo their animal to increase the return of lost pets.

An article* written by the former President of the San Francisco SPCA states:

“The San Francisco SPCA has considered the various claims made for mandatory cat licensing, and has found neither evidence nor common sense to support them. In our view, the primary effects of mandatory cat licensing would be to:

- Put the lives and well-being of cats at risk, and rationalize round-up-and-kill campaigns;
- Penalize responsible cat owners, and force many compassionate caretakers to stop providing for homeless cats; Cost taxpayers money; and
- Inappropriately expand the power of government.

Indeed the most vocal proponents of cat licensing have been animal control agencies and humane organizations that hold contracts to do animal control - the very organizations that stand to gain the most in terms of more staff, larger budgets, and expanded enforcement power. Since none of this expanded power will help either cats, their caretakers, or taxpayers, we cannot escape the conclusion that the call for cat licensing has more to do with entrenching bureaucracy than with compassion, saving lives, and providing a helping hand to those who care.”

* *Against Cat Licensing by Richard Avanzino & Pam Rockwell*