

des moines county
HUMANE SOCIETY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BURLINGTON, Iowa — One female dog and her offspring can produce 67,000 puppies in six years. One female cat and her offspring can produce 370,000 kittens in seven years.

Where will all of those animals end up?

Burlington's population is 25,527. Des Moines County is home to 40,318.

Animal shelters are not the cause, but the symptom of an irresponsible segment of society that believes pets are disposable.

Those working at animal shelters are dedicated to doing everything they can to help these animals that are thrown away by those who are supposed to care for them.

Animal control facilities – like the Burlington Animal Shelter — were formed for public safety and rabies control. They are essential to a community's health because zoonotic disease epidemics can spread through both human and animal populations.

These animal control facilities are usually contracted by the local city or county animal control departments and are funded with tax dollars. The Des Moines County Humane Society and the City of Burlington have a partnership in which the Humane Society runs the Burlington Animal Shelter, the city's animal control center. The city owns and cares for the building, and reimburses the Humane Society for the care of animals that are still the city's responsibility.

The shelter has a staff of one full-time employee and four part-time employees, all of whom do more than is what required of them in caring for the shelter's animals. A volunteer group of more than 200 area residents — including the 21-member Humane Society board of directors — provides incredible care for the animals out of a shared love for the dogs and cats that come through our doors.

The Burlington Animal Shelter – like other animal control centers – is an open-admission shelter, it cannot pick and choose which animals it accepts. It must accept all animals, including those turned away by no-kill shelters who have no room for more animals. The Burlington Animal Shelter often places two or more dogs in kennels, and houses animals in portable kennels, in attempts to keep more animals for longer periods. It houses lost and stray animals until owners can be found. It houses animals involved in criminal cases. It takes in animals surrendered by the general public.

For stray animals brought in by the City of Burlington's animal control officer or other peace officers from the city, West Burlington, or Des Moines County, there is a set holding period while the owner is located and contacted. If the owner cannot be found, or if the owner agrees to surrender the animal, it then goes up for adoption.

Once the animal goes up for adoption, the Humane Society has no set time limit for keeping it. If possible, the shelter would keep all of its animals until they found homes. Unfortunately this cannot be the case. Decisions on euthanization are not based on how long an animal has been at the shelter. When decisions must be made, they are based mainly on temperament and health concerns, with space and resource considerations brought in as well.

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There are just not enough responsible homes for discarded pets.

The Burlington Animal Shelter took in approximately 502 impounded dogs and cats in 2011. One hundred forty-three of those animals were not claimed by an owner.

Some city-owned animal control facilities across the country have attempted to become no-kill shelters, a popular but unrealistic idea that has become trendy in recent years.

In those 30 communities, success has been rare. Expenses sky-rocketed; one shelter asked its city government to more than triple its animal control subsidy in five years; another increased its animal control budget by \$2 million over three years.

In no-kill shelters, animals may spend years of their lives locked in small cages with little human or animal interaction. Animals in this situation often become withdrawn, severely depressed, and aggressive, all of which reduce their chances for adoption. At cageless facilities, there is an increased chance of disease epidemics and fighting.

Decreasing euthanizations – and moving toward a no-kill animal control center — is achievable, but requires the effort and active involvement of an entire community, and a commitment from the local government.

- Education and increased spay/neuter rates are just the first step. Affordable and accessible spay/neuter programs need to be offered to reduce local pet populations. Such a program is paramount to ending pet overpopulation, and euthanization. Pet owners need resources to help resolve normal pet behavior issues, so a misbehaving animal does not end up back in a shelter.

- Citizens must be encouraged to adopt from shelters and rescues, and seek to end mass breeding and sales of animals in pet stores and at puppy sales. Nationwide, only 20 percent of dogs in homes come from shelters, while nearly 10,000 puppy mills churn out puppies.

- A Trap-and-Release program needs to be implemented to help manage feral cat populations.

These problems are reflections of our society, its throw-away mentality, and irresponsible pet owners.

Without a community and its government coming together to address these issues, an animal control center will always be needed to shoulder the burden left by others.

For more information on the subject of no-kill and open-admission shelters, please contact Susan Denk, Des Moines County Humane Society Co-President, at 319-671-0147.

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