

# Deadline approaching for new, vital, animal-control report

*President of the Maine Animal Control Association advises how to make sure your municipality's animal-control totals are as complete as possible.*

**By Rebecca Parker, Animal Control Officer, Town of Kennebunk Police Department  
President, Maine Animal Control Association**

One of the many new laws enacted recently affects all those in your municipality who respond to animal control complaints. The Maine law requires all complaints related to animal control incidents for the prior year be reported to the State Animal Welfare Program by Jan. 31, 2019, for the previous 12 months' activity. Maine cities and towns vary greatly in how an animal complaint is received and responded to.

Each municipality is required by law to have an Animal Control Officer (ACO.) There are over 300 ACOs in Maine, some of whom work for multiple towns. In addition, most law enforcement agencies also receive animal complaints from a police dispatch center, and either the local police agency or a county sheriff's department handles the call. Depending upon the seriousness of the call (i.e. dangerous dog or nuisance barking), the call then might be than be passed on to the municipal ACO. Town offices also field animal complaints directly, and those calls are passed on to either law enforcement and/or the ACO.

Tallying up animal control complaints for the newly required state report certainly becomes a challenge. However, proper numbers are imperative for essential staffing, budgeting, proper training, etc.

So, how many animal complaint calls does your city or town receive in a year? What number does an average size Maine town receive? How many dangerous dogs live in your town? How many animal cruelty complaints do other Maine municipalities get a year compared to yours? How much was spent

on the animal cruelty case(s)? Did the city or town manager, select board and finance director budget funds accordingly for such events? Does the State Animal Welfare Program (run by the Department of Agriculture) pay for the associated veterinarian and boarding costs for animal cruelty cases or does the town? Is it true that some towns have paid for animal cruelty cases, yet the state takes care of the expense for others? Where is the answer sheet!?

This new law is as follows: **Title 7: Agriculture and Animals; Part 9: Animal Welfare; Chapter 725: Municipal Duties; §3948. Animal Control**

**Reporting.** *By Jan. 31 of each year, a municipality shall report to the animal welfare program of the department all complaints related to animal control incidents for the prior calendar year. The report must include the number and type of animal complaints received and responded to by municipal animal control officer's law enforcement officers or municipal officials and the outcomes of each investigation. The reports must be on forms provided by the department.*

This new law will be a much needed starting point in order to have the proper data to access municipalities' needs. The state Animal Welfare Program has provided municipalities with a form to complete (see next page). It is important that, when your city or town office begins to use this form,

to not only forward your ACO a copy, but also the law enforcement agency, which serves your community. Also, include your municipal clerk(s) in order to obtain the most accurate account of calls received. Remember, rabies issues are a municipal responsibility, as are any animals the public fears as rabid. These calls are to be included in this form. Many towns receive a respectable number of these calls, yet many disregard them as "game warden issues." City and towns should make sure their totals are as complete as possible.

State Animal Welfare Director Liam Hughes said: "All we are asking for is to have the questionnaire sent back to us by the deadline with whatever information you have."

The importance of this information to be tallied correctly going forward is crucial for Maine towns and cities to be able to respond according with resources.

I enjoyed speaking with many of you already on this subject (as well as others) while at the Maine Municipal Convention last October. I am slotted for a time at this year's Maine Municipal Convention (Oct. 2-3, at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor) and plan to address this and other topics. If you have a different topic or issue you feel would also be beneficial to address, please let me know! ■

The Maine Municipal Association (MMA) is a voluntary membership organization offering an array of professional services to municipalities and other local governmental entities in Maine.

**MMA's services include advocacy, education and information, professional legal and personnel advisory services, and group insurance self-funded programs.**

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