



Atlanta Police Department – Standard Operating Procedure			
	<b>APD.SOP.3041 – Animal Encounters and Investigations</b> <b>Effective Date: November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025</b>		
<b>Chief Darin Schierbaum</b>	<b>Signature by: DS</b>	<b>Date Signed: 11/4/2025</b>	<b>Expires: 2029</b>

## SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

### APD Staff,

The Policy and Standards Section is dedicated to providing the department, and its employees, with accurate, understandable and transparent policies. In order to publish policies that reflect the most up-to-date standards, the Policy and Standard Section regularly reviews all policies to ensure that they are reflective of the current mission and objectives of the Atlanta Police Department.

The name of this policy has been changed from Investigating Police Discharge towards Animals to *Animal Encounters and Investigations*.

Please read the following policy in its entirety for significant and important changes when encountering both domestic and wild animals. Most importantly find the following vital changes:

- A supervisor must be on scene when euthanizing wildlife. (Section 4.5.3)
- Euthanasia is only permitted for wildlife when the animal requires human intervention to end its suffering from injuries sustained as a result of an incident or vehicle collision. (Section 4.5.1)
- With the exception of City Ordinance violations, Fulton County Police Departments Animal Cruelty Unit will be investigating cases of animal abuse and neglect, once it has been confirmed and not related to a domestic violence situation.

**Thank you and stay informed!**

**Policy and Standards Section**  
**Planning, Research, and Accreditation Unit**



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**1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Policy is to set guidelines and procedures for sworn personnel who encounter aggressive, abused or injured domestic and wild animals.

**2. POLICY**

The Atlanta Police Department understands that all animals, especially domesticated animals, have a right to life and recognizes the complexity of the human-animal relationship. This policy is to address incidents that arise from human-animal interactions and provide guidelines in the event an animal places the public's safety in jeopardy.

**3. RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 3.1 Division commanders will ensure that all employees under their command adhere to and comply with this policy; will review all firearm discharges involving department approved firearms and make necessary recommendations concerning action related to the investigation.
- 3.2 Unit commanders will be responsible for overseeing all investigations for Atlanta Police discharges involving a department-approved firearm towards animals that occur within their respective units.
- 3.3 Supervisors will ensure that sworn employees follow the direction of this Directive.
- 3.4 The Office of Professional Standards commander will ensure that investigations of firearms discharges are conducted in accordance with this directive, as well as notify the Atlanta Citizen Review Board for all incidents where a firearm is discharged.
- 3.5 The Range Masters are responsible for providing training to the TFOs, and any other units authorized by the Chief of Police, or their designee, regarding the destruction of animals.
- 3.6 The TFO commander is responsible for ensuring the TFO's compliance with this directive.

**4. ACTION**

**4.1 ANIMAL ABUSE CALLS FOR SERVICE**

- 4.1.1 Officers responding to reported calls of animal-related abuse will investigate to determine if the abuse is animal abuse and neglect, or if the abuse is a result of domestic violence.
- 4.1.2 If animal abuse or neglect is discovered, or if a domesticated animal is injured as a result of a crime, the officer will request Animal Control to the scene and notify the Domestic Violence unit.
- 4.1.3 For domesticated animals, Animal Control will provide care and retain the animal as evidence for the criminal case. If the call is neglect and abuse only, and not related to domestic violence, Animal Control and/or the Domestic Violence Unit will advise Fulton County Police Department's Animal Investigations Unit to assist.
- 4.1.4 If an officer suspects or sees that there is animal abuse in a home, it is important to check on the welfare of the other occupants of the house including the spouse, any children, and any elderly in the home.
- 4.1.5 Any investigations found to confirm animal abuse and neglect must be documented in a report and sent to the Domestic Violence Unit for follow up.



#### 4.2 AGGRESSIVE ANIMALS

4.2.1 When reasonable, officers who come into contact with an aggressive animal will make every attempt to allow the owner to bring their animal under control and/or remove their animal from the immediate area before taking enforcement action.

4.2.2 When officers have sufficient advanced notice that a potentially dangerous domesticated animal may be encountered, such as the serving of a search warrant, officers will develop a reasonable contingency plan for dealing with the animal without the use of deadly force.

*Nothing in this policy will prohibit any officer from resorting to lethal force to control a vicious or dangerous animal if circumstances reasonably dictate that a contingency plan has failed or become impracticable.*

4.2.3 If the officer is placed in a situation where the aggressive animal is a threat to the safety of the officer or any citizen, they may use whichever force is reasonable and necessary to stop the threat.

#### 4.3 DISCHARGING FIREARMS TOWARDS DOMESTICATED ANIMALS

4.3.1 An officer who discharges their firearm will, as soon as the scene is safe, secure the scene regardless of whether or not the animal was actually struck by the projectile(s), and advise communications and a supervisor that they have discharged their firearm.

4.3.2 The officer who discharges their department approved firearm at an animal will:

1. Safely secure the partially loaded firearm when the threat no longer exists.
2. Immediately notify their supervisor of the incident.
3. Request an ID unit to the scene.
4. Present the firearm for inspection to the investigating supervisor.
5. Pull the call in as a 17-F and complete a Use of Force incident report.

4.3.3 After arriving on scene, the supervisor will:

1. Ensure that an Identification Unit responds to the scene.
2. Request the assistance of Animal Control. If the responding Animal Control personnel complete a report, the supervisor will request a case number to add to the incident report.
3. Inspect the officer's weapon and record the number of remaining rounds as well as ensure the rounds and firearm were authorized by the Department.
4. Ensure all evidence at the incident scene is collected, including spent shell casings from the officer's department approved firearm and is properly turned into the Property Control Unit.
5. Contact an OPS supervisor and advise them of the circumstances regarding the incident.
6. Prior to the end of their tour of duty, the investigating supervisor will complete [Form APD 809](#) "Supervisor's Use of Force Incident Supplement Form" (Use of Force Report) for an officer who discharges a department approved firearm at a domesticated animal and a detailed memorandum describing the incident and the incident scene.



- 4.3.4 The investigating supervisor will complete an OPS command investigation file of the incident that will include: available photographs of the incident scene, available statements from officers at the scene, witness statements (if applicable), the supervisor's memorandum, the incident report, the Use of Force Report, the investigation disposition form, and any other documents or items that may be pertinent to the investigation.
- 4.3.5 The completed OPS command investigation file will be submitted through the employee's chain of command to OPS for review and recommendation.
- 4.3.6 All completed OPS command files will be maintained and stored at OPS.
- 4.3.7 OPS will assist any supervisor requesting support in the completion of an investigation file.
- 4.3.8 The OPS commander reserves the right to investigate any employee involved in the investigation of police discharge towards animals.

#### **4.4 FIREARM DISCHARGE BY AN OFF-DUTY OFFICER**

- 4.4.1 If a discharge of a department approved firearm towards an animal occurs while the officer is off duty or outside of APD's jurisdiction, the officer will immediately notify their supervisor. If there is no on-duty supervisor working at the officer's work site, the officer will contact communications and request the OPS on-call supervisor.
- 4.4.2 The officer will also immediately contact the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction where the discharge occurred and advise them of the incident.
- 4.4.3 If a unit supervisor is notified of a discharge involving a department approved firearm towards an animal by an officer who is off-duty or outside of APD jurisdiction, the supervisor will immediately contact an OPS supervisor.
- 4.4.4 The Office of Professional Standards will conduct the investigation.

#### **4.5 EUTHANIZING WILDLIFE**

- 4.5.1 Euthanasia is only permitted for wildlife when the animal requires human intervention to end its suffering from injuries sustained as a result of an incident or vehicle collision.
- 4.5.2 While on the scene of an incident/accident and an officer encounters wildlife that has been injured, and it is apparent that it is beyond repair, the officer will notify their supervisor that an animal on scene will need to be euthanized.
- 4.5.3 A supervisor is required to be on scene and raise a Tactical Field Officer (TFO) to assist with euthanizing the animal. If no TFO's are available, the supervisor may designate an officer who has previous training and/or experience.
- 4.5.4 The destruction of the animal is only permitted if it can be done safely and would not pose a risk to the life or property of the officer or other citizens. The area must be secured, and the members of the public should be advised to leave the area for their safety, prior to the designated personnel arriving on scene to euthanize the animal.
- 4.5.5 Once the supervisor and the TFO, or designee, confirm the scene is safe to discharge their department authorized weapon, they will do so with their body camera activated and in compliance with their training.



- 4.5.6 After the animal has been euthanized, the TFO/designated officer will move the carcass away from the right-of-way to vehicle and foot traffic and request dispatch to notify sanitation for pickup.
- 4.5.7 If the TFO/designated officer is not the primary reporting officer, they will need to complete a supplemental narrative in order to replace the spent ammunition.
- 4.5.8 The on-scene supervisor must send a memo to OPS to advise them of the firearm discharge, so that OPS can make the proper notifications to the ACRB as well as complete a Use-of-Force report for the discharge of the firearm, however the category of force must be selected as “Animal Euthanasia”.

## 5. DEFINITIONS

Department approved firearm: Any firearm issued to an APD employee purchased by the department, or any firearm that was inspected and approved by the Atlanta Police Academy and the employee has prior written approval to carry on or off duty.

Wildlife: Animals that are not pets and are not tamed or domesticated. Wildlife is considered to be living in a natural environment and not depending on human intervention for survival. (i.e. deer, coyotes, raccoons, fox, bear)

Domestic animals: Animals that are considered Pets (cats, dogs, ferrets). This will include animals that live outside in a fenced in area such as horses, cows, llamas and goats.

## 6. CANCELLATIONS

APD.SOP.3041 “Investigating Police Discharges Towards Animals”; effective August 1, 2020.

APD.SOP.3043 – Animal Cruelty Enforcement and Prevention Squad (merged and archived)

## 7. REFERENCES