



Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

Sheriff Carl Ritchie

9-20 ANIMAL CONTROL

- NEW
- REVISED
- REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference: N/A
CALEA Standards Reference: N/A
NCCHC Standards Reference: N/A
SCLEA Standards Reference: N/A
SC Minimum Standards: N/A

This policy dated 4/7/2025 replaces prior policy dated 3/6/2022 and supersedes all previously issued directives.

I. Purpose:

To establish procedures for the animal control function of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office.

II. Policy:

It is the policy of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to provide for an Animal Control Unit to enforce State statutes and Charleston County Animal Control ordinances; and to ensure the welfare and humane treatment of all domestic animals under the jurisdiction of the County of Charleston.

III. Definitions:

- A. For purposes of this procedure, the word "deputy" applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.
- B. *Animal Control Deputy*: An employee who is Class 1 certified by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (SCCJA), designated by the Sheriff to enforce the laws of the state and county, assigned to the Animal Control Unit.
- C. *Animal Control Officer*: An employee who is not certified by the SCCJA, designated by the Sheriff to enforce only Charleston County animal control ordinances, assigned to the Animal Control Unit.
- D. *Animal Control Field Training Instructor (FTI)*: A current Animal Control deputy selected in accordance with all FTI selection provisions in [Policy 8-02 Filed Training Instructor Program](#). In the event that there is not an Animal Control deputy that meets the requirements to be selected as an Animal Control FTI, the Animal Control Sergeant may be required to provide the necessary field training. Should circumstances dictate, the Animal Control FTI when needed may supplement the Patrol FTI function.

IV. Procedure

A. Administration:

- 1. The Animal Control Unit of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office is a specialized unit that operates as a component of the Bureau of Patrol and Investigative Services.

2. Animal Control is available during scheduled working hours to handle domestic animal related complaints.
3. The Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center (911 Center) will receive calls for animal control services and dispatch Animal Control personnel. Animal related calls for service during non-working hours will require Patrol deputies to be dispatched.
4. Animal Control will be available during non-duty hours on a rotational call-out basis.
5. During non-duty hours, call-out must be authorized by an on duty Patrol supervisor. The 911 Center will advise on-call Animal Control personnel of emergency situations only. Calls for service that are not of an emergency nature and do not require immediate attention will be held until the next working day.
6. Situations which might require call-out of Animal Control include:
 - a. the arrest of an individual with a domestic animal when no authorized party is available to take control of the animal;
 - b. an injured domestic animal which was verified by sworn personnel to be injured, in need of immediate care, and the owner is not present;
 - c. livestock in the roadway or otherwise causing a danger and the owner of the livestock cannot be located;
 - d. a vicious or suspected rabid domestic animal which is still on-scene;
 - e. a dog or cat bite in which the animal is still on-scene and the owner cannot be located; or
 - f. a domestic animal which is in a life threatening situation due to abuse or neglect and needs to be in protective custody.
7. Situations of a potentially inflammatory or problematic nature which do not meet the emergency call-out criteria will be handled on a case by case basis.

8. In no instance will employees of this agency advise complainants to attempt to restrain or control animals believed to be vicious, ill, or non-domestic (e.g., raccoons, opossums, foxes, etc.).

B. Duties of the Animal Control Unit:

1. The duties of the Animal Control Unit include, but are not limited to:
 - a. enforcing State statutes and Charleston County animal control ordinances in accordance with the deputy's or officer's authority;
 - b. responding to all domestic animal bite calls during normal working hours and provide follow-up coordination with the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) as it relates to animal bites and rabies control;
 - c. coordinating the logging in and sheltering of domestic animals with a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office;
 - d. capturing and removing stray domestic animals;
 - e. responding to a domestic animal in the roadway for the purpose of identifying a possible microchip or tag. If the owner is identified; an attempt to contact the owner will be made. An effort should be made to move domestic animal carcasses out of the roadway when it possess a traffic hazard.
 - f. ensuring care is provided for injured domestic animals in emergency situations;
 - g. investigating complaints of mistreatment or neglect of domestic animals;
 - h. as needed, will assist with Patrol duties and calls for service in accordance with the deputy or officers authority; and
 - i. maintaining all assigned agency uniforms, vehicles, and authorized equipment.

2. Wildlife Calls for Service:
 - a. Animal Control personnel will not set traps to capture wildlife, unless the animal is involved in an animal bite incident.
 - b. If a citizen has a wildlife nuisance problem, they will be provided with phone numbers of local nuisance wildlife services.

- C. Capture of Stray Animals:
 1. Animal Control will utilize proper equipment provided for the capture of stray domestic animals. This equipment includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. nets;
 - b. capture/control poles;
 - c. traps;
 - d. cat catcher (trap);
 - e. bite gloves; and
 - f. any other authorized equipment.

 2. Animal Control personnel are provided with traps for the purpose of trapping nuisance domestic animals which cannot be caught in some other manner.
 - a. Traps will be set at locations requested by the public as soon as available.
 - b. Normally, a trap will be left in place for a period not to exceed three (3) days, unless particularly productive.
 - c. Animal Control will ensure that traps are set in such a manner as to prevent the trap from being an attractive hazard to children playing, who might otherwise become trapped (i.e., not to be set at or near schoolyards, playgrounds, etc.).
 - d. Animal Control will ensure that traps are set in an area so as to minimize the chance of theft or damage.

- e. Traps will not be set during times of inclement weather, over weekends, or long holiday periods unless directed to do so by an Animal Control supervisor.

D. Injured Animals:

1. Animal Control may be requested to respond to the scene of injured domestic animals where emergency treatment may be required. Every reasonable effort will be made to locate the owner of the animal.
2. When failing to locate the owner of the animal, Animal Control will ensure that the domestic animal is transported a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office for treatment.
 - a. If the animal is wearing a tag, that veterinary service may be contacted for service.
 - b. If the animal is not wearing a tag, a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office will be used during normal business hours.
 - c. After normal business hours, tagged or untagged animals will be transported to an authorized emergency animal hospital.
3. The Center for Birds of Prey can be called for sick or injured birds of prey or wading birds. The Keepers of the Wild can be contacted for other species. Injured deer can be handled by the on scene deputy. Citizens will be advised to contact the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) in reference to nuisance alligators and all other wildlife animals.

E. Captured/Relinquished Animals:

1. Every attempt shall be made to locate the owner of a stray domestic animal prior to transport. Animal Control will scan each animal for a microchip (unless unsafe to perform). The domestic animal can then be turned over to the owner if located.
2. Domestic animals captured by Animal Control will be transported to a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the

Sheriff's Office and delivered to that service when there is no owner identified or located, or if they are relinquished to Animal Control.

- a. Domestic animals captured as strays or in traps will be logged-in as stray animals and will be turned over to a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office.
 - b. Owners who wish to relinquish ownership of their domesticated animal should first be referred to the Charleston Animal Society for assistance. Should Animal Control find it to be in the best interest of the owner and/or domestic animal to accept custody from the owner, it will be transported and logged-in at a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office as an *owner surrender* with a *Voluntary Release of Personal Animal Ownership / Custody Form (CCSO form-240)* completed.
 - c. Animal Control will not respond to non-domestic animals, such as raccoon, opossums, etc., and the 911 Center will advise the complainant to contact the Department of Natural Resources for assistance, or will be provided with phone numbers of local nuisance wildlife services.
3. Domestic animals in custody will be delivered to a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office no less than once during each shift subject to the following:
- a. During inclement weather, Animal Control will make as many trips to the shelter as considered necessary to protect animals from over-exposure to the elements.
 - b. When the temperature exceeds 90°F, an animal must be provided with water at a minimum of every hour, and may not be held on the truck for more than two (2) consecutive hours.
 - c. When the temperature falls below 40°F, animals will not be kept on the truck for more than two (2) consecutive hours, assuming the truck will be moving during the majority of that time.

F. Animal Bite Cases:

1. Animal Control will respond to all domestic animal bite complaints during regular duty hours and complete an *Incident Report* within RMS; to include information regarding the responsible animal, if possible. After regular working hours, a deputy sheriff will respond to domestic animal bite complaints and complete an *Incident Report* within RMS and a copy forwarded to the Animal Control supervisor. Animal Control will conduct the follow up.
2. Animal Control or the responding deputy sheriff will make every effort to identify the domestic animal responsible for the bite and determine if the animal has been properly vaccinated. Any animal that is at-large, and the owner cannot be identified and located, will be taken into custody by Animal Control and relinquished to a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office for quarantine.
3. Animal Control will be responsible for notifying DHEC of all bite cases reported and coordinating with that department regarding quarantine of the animal as appropriate.

G. Animal Cruelty / Neglect Cases:

1. This includes but is not limited to cock fighting and dog fighting. Animal Control deputies will be assigned to any incident associated with cruelty or neglect. The appropriate state statutes will be charged accordingly.
2. Animal Control deputies may remove an animal due to neglect or abuse which will require a court order signed by a County Magistrate. The owner of the animal(s) will receive a copy of the signed court order. A sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office will house the seized animal(s) and provide an in depth veterinary report of the animal(s) health.
3. Any cruelty or neglect involving the death of an animal may require a necropsy as part of an investigation. In these circumstances, a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office will make arrangements with a veterinary facility for the necropsy.

H. Animal Control Ordinance:

1. Animal Control, or the responding deputy sheriff, will take complaints of domestic animals at-large, nuisance domestic animals, or other

violations of the Charleston County Animal Control Ordinance. Efforts will be made to contact the owners of offending animals, attempting to gain voluntary compliance through personal contact and interaction. Responding deputy sheriffs shall forward a copy of the incident report to the Animal Control supervisor if follow-up action is required or requested.

2. Where indicated, Animal Control or the responding deputy sheriff should issue a citation(s) for animal control related violation(s) as set forth by [Charleston County Ordinance, Chapter 3 - Livability, Article 1 - Animals and Fowl](#).
3. Animal Control officers and deputy sheriffs will only enforce Charleston County ordinances within the unincorporated areas of Charleston County. However, Charleston County ordinances may be enforced within a municipality only if the municipality has the same ordinance language verbatim and the municipality has consented to allowing Charleston County Sheriff's Office to enforce the ordinance within their jurisdiction.

I. Reporting:

1. Any reports or forms completed during a shift must be turned in to the Animal Control supervisor by the end of the shift.
2. Animal Control will complete an agency *Incident Report* within RMS on cases including, but not limited to the following:
 - a. domestic animal bites;
 - b. rabid domestic animals;
 - c. confirmed domestic animal neglect/cruelty cases;
 - d. prohibited or endangered animals; and
 - e. repeat offenders.

J. The responsibilities of the Animal Control supervisor include the following:

1. Completing all administrative paperwork to include:
 - a. Review for approval all submitted reports, forms, and documents.

- b. Budgetary requests for equipment, training, etc.
 2. Serving as liaison with sheltering organizations, area veterinarians, other agency's animal control units, and the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC).
 3. Investigating citizen complaints.
 4. Working as an Animal Control deputy when needed, when the work load warrants, and when Animal Control personnel are on annual leave, sick leave, special assignment, etc.
 4. Oversee the activation of the Charleston County Emergency Pet Shelter plan in the event of a declared emergency.
- K. Employee Rabies Vaccination:

As a precautionary measure, Animal Control personnel will have the option of receiving the series of Rabies Protection shots offered by the Charleston County Health Department. These shots will be provided at no cost to the employee.
- L. Training:
 1. Animal Control FTI(s) will accomplish on-the-job training for all newly assigned Animal Control personnel in accordance with *Policy 8-02 Field Training Instructor Program*.
 2. Animal Control officers will complete field training in accordance with the *Policy 8-02 Field Training Instructor Program* within their limitations and authority. They will also be subject to provisions outlined in *Policy 8-02 Field Training Instructor Program* for their appearance before a Review Board for release from training.
 3. The Animal Control FTI will be required to attend all FTI meetings and in-service training requirements as scheduled by the Training Unit.
 4. Animal Control personnel may be required to attend specialized training when available to enhance their skills required in the performance of their assignment.

5. The Animal Control supervisor will ensure that all Animal Control personnel receive the necessary prescribed training commensurate with their Animal Control responsibilities.
- M. Use of Less than Lethal Weapons issued to Animal Control Officers
1. Animal Control officers will act in compliance with all agency use of force and less than lethal weapons policies commensurate with their limitations and authority, to include the reporting of uses of force and less than lethal weapons.
 2. Animal Control officers will be issued less than lethal weapons after successfully completing the required training course(s). The Training Unit will be responsible for coordinating this training as well as required subsequent recertification or refresher training.
 3. Animal Control officers will only use less than lethal weapons as a last resort measure for self-preservation or to disengage an aggressive animal that is attacking either a person or another animal.
 4. Animal Control officers will not use their issued less than lethal weapons on humans unless to defend themselves against a serious bodily injury assault.
 5. A less than lethal weapon may be used to deter medium to large animals, but will not be utilized on small animals or cats.
 6. If the Taser Energy Weapon 10 (TEW) is used on an animal by Animal Control; the animal will be safely secured and the TEW prongs will be removed. If the animal is too aggressive or the probes are embedded, the animal will be transported to a sheltering organization that has been deemed appropriate by the Sheriff's Office for prong removal. If they are closed, the animal will be transported to an authorized veterinarian clinic or emergency animal hospital.
 7. Animal Control officers will be responsible for conducting a function test on their TEW prior to duty, as outlined in [Policy 7-06 Taser Energy Weapon](#). Any malfunctions will be reported to the Animal Control Supervisor.