

PHS/SPCA BY THE NUMBERS

NOTE: The data provided below was most recently updated on March 14, 2009 and will be routinely updated.

The numbers at a glance...

...in 2008 alone, PHS/SPCA saved the lives of 6,860 homeless, injured, orphaned, unwanted, lost, abandoned and mistreated animals, including companion animals, farmed animals, exotic animals and native wildlife – every animal brought to our doors is welcome...

...which is an increase of over 9% of lives saved compared to just the year before...

...has reduced euthanasia in San Mateo County by 95% since 1970 and continues every year to push ahead, making this among the safest and best places in the nation for companion animals...

...guarantees a home for 100% of the healthy, adoptable dogs and cats we receive, with animals now able to remain at the shelter and receive love, care and attention for the days, weeks, months, even a year or longer it may take until a new permanent home and family is found...

...continues each year to increase the numbers of pets treated and then adopted through our Hope Program, an ever growing percentage of the many animals who come to us sick, injured, too young to be away from their mothers, or behaviorally challenged...

...all of this wonderful work made possible, in part, through the support of over 1,300 active volunteers and more than 22,000 local contributing families and households.

For more details about the statistics behind the success, please read below....



THE PURPOSE OF THIS SECTION: As the largest and most effective animal welfare and protection charitable organization in this community, the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA (PHS/SPCA) absolutely believes in transparency and accountability. While the work we and others do for animals can not be completely explained by the statistics alone, the numbers do of

course help explain the story – and by any measure, the information provided through these statistics is both very positive and encouraging. The purpose of this section of our website is to provide an opportunity for individuals and organizations to review PHS/SPCA's efforts by those numbers.

WHAT TO MEASURE: It only makes sense that most people looking at shelters want to measure the effectiveness of those hands-on programs which save lives – how many animals were saved, and how many were euthanized: those are the two questions most frequently asked. But to fully understand the answers to those questions, one must know more than simply a set of numbers, One must keep in mind that, as in most situations, numbers only have meaning if understood within a meaningful context: for example, while the number 100 can mean “perfect” on an exam, it can also indicate a really lousy score in the context of the 1600 points available for the SATs. Or, in yet another context, it can mean the start of an illness if measuring your body's temperature with 98.6 as the norm. So while of course every individual life saved must be celebrated as a victory and every life lost acknowledged as a failure, context is needed to judge a shelter's effectiveness through its numbers.

So what is the context for reviewing a shelter's numbers? What, really, are you measuring? There are three parts to answering that question.

1. First, it's important to know how well a shelter is doing compared to itself: what was its success last year and the years before? Is progress being made, are programs and initiatives working? Are the numbers growing in the right direction, are more lives being saved over time?
2. Second, it's important to know how well that shelter is doing in comparison to others, but that's not actually easy to figure out. To do so requires knowing definitions of the terms used by those several sheltering organizations which are being compared, making sure the comparison is truly “apples-to-apples”. In other words, what does it really mean to learn a shelter hasn't euthanized any animals if it is accomplishing that goal by refusing animals left to be euthanized at another shelter? Can you really compare those two shelters effectiveness? Perhaps, but it's obviously going to be more complicated than simply placing their numbers side by side.
3. And finally, it's important to know if the shelter is moving towards a clearly expressed long-term goal, and then to look to see if their statistics demonstrate progress towards that goal.

Although the language may vary, in fact most progressive communities and their shelters now express that goal as the sum of two separately ambitious objectives, and that certainly includes PHS/SPCA. The first objective is to end

the euthanasia of all animals who come to the shelter as healthy, adoptable animals. And once that is accomplished, the second objective through our Hope Program is to make well ever increasing numbers of animals who come to the shelter with treatable medical and behavioral problems, and eventually end the euthanasia of those animals as well. (More about those terms, below.)

So if that's the goal and that's what you're looking to measure, what is the scale? What are the measures or the matrices best used to look at a shelter, to look at PHS/SPCA?

THE MEASURES: There have been a number of efforts over the past several years to develop standard measures for statistical reporting by both private humane societies and their government animal control counterparts. These measures have proven helpful but, as yet, there's no perfect system in place. Something that is not always clear to the public, the thousands of private and public animal organizations around the nation are each separate and distinct entities, not members or chapters of some national organization, and as such each keeps its statistics in the way they chose as best for their particular programs.

In recognition of this and of the immense variation in both programs and communities, even those measures which strive to eventually become the universal standard leave critically important definitions up to the individual organization utilizing those measures – as such, it still remains exceedingly difficult to find a meaningful “apples to apples” comparison between different shelters.

Many shelters – for reasons of resources or philosophy – only accept into their care some of the homeless animals in their community, so comparing their numbers with a different community's shelter which accepts every animal is a false and potentially misleading comparison. Some shelters will automatically euthanize animals over a certain age or of a certain breed, classifying them as “non-adoptable” by virtue of their age or breed. Some shelters consider feral or under-socialized cats to be more like native wildlife than like house pets and, as such, do not count the deaths of those animals in their statistics about the companion animals in their shelters. And many shelters, perhaps most, exclude rabbits and other small companion animals in their numbers when in reality unwanted rabbits are now virtually as common in many parts of the nation as are dogs and cats.

It is also important to note that shelters under contract with their County and cities to perform state-mandated animal control work and required to accept all stray animals, are not required to accept any animals surrendered by owners. This means any animal control agency can improve its save rate by simply not accepting the surrendered animals they feel will be difficult to place into new

homes. For a busy shelter, this could be a few thousand animals each year not “counted” in their year-end statistics. Most owners will take their rejected animal to the next closest shelter willing to accept the pet; that shelter will see its save rate suffer as the result of its non-discriminatory admissions policy. Required by law or not, PHS/SPCA on the other hand feels an ethical obligation to accept every animal.

Again, those who review shelters with a critical eye are cautioned to understand the numbers rather than to simply accept them. Perhaps the most valuable comparison isn't only from shelter to shelter, but instead by reviewing an individual shelter's progress over time. Both opportunities are presented here regarding the work of PHS/SPCA.

PHS/SPCA, AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: Although founded in 1952, PHS/SPCA's shelter records only exist as far back as 1970. While it would be interesting to know the story of those first 18 years, nonetheless we are now able to take a serious look at the result of one organization's, and one community's, four decades of dedication to saving lives.

In that earliest year on record, 1970, PHS/SPCA was clearly overwhelmed with homeless companion animals. Interestingly, 1970 is also the year PHS/SPCA opened the doors of its low-cost public spay/neuter clinic and just a few years prior to beginning its public education and advocacy department. As is apparent in the chart below, the positive results of those efforts would take years to bear results.

In 1970, PHS/SPCA euthanized a total of 37,680 dogs and cats, a truly horrifying number (the numbers of other animals euthanized are not available for those early years). And while the death of a single animal is a death too many, compare that number with the 2,015 dogs and cats euthanized in 2008 and you will recognize a reduction in euthanasia of 94.6%, a remarkable achievement for this community. The chart below demonstrates that progress over time, with footnotes pointing to key program developments believed at least partially responsible for that progress.

Table 1: An Historical Perspective

CALENDAR YEAR	EUTHANIZED DOGS	EUTHANIZED CATS	EUTHANIZED TOTAL
1970 [see NOTE 1]	15,884	21,796	37,680
1975 [see NOTE 2]	8,321	8,413	16,734
1980	3,648	4,775	8,423
1986 [see NOTE 3]	3,502	6,988	10,490
1990 [see NOTE 4]	1,738	7,300	9,038
1993 [see NOTE 3]	1,269	6,207	7,476
2002	881	2,500	3,381
2003 [see NOTE 5]	679	2,699	3,378
2004	644	2,063	2,707
2005 [see NOTE 6]	686	2,020	2,706
2006	642	1,971	2,613
2007	476	1,819	2,295
2008 [see NOTE 7]	554	1,461	2,015

FOOTNOTES:

1. As noted above, statistics for the year prior to 1970 are not available. 1970 is also the year that PHS/SPCA opened its low-cost public spay/neuter clinic, a clinic which has been in constant operation since that date.
2. PHS/SPCA opened its public education/advocacy program in 1975, a program which has been in constant operation since that date.
3. Data for 1986 is presented here because complete, comparable data is not available for 1985; 1993 is used instead of 1995 for the same reason.
4. San Mateo County and PHS/SPCA introduced the Pet Overpopulation Ordinance in 1990. This ordinance is largely viewed today as a failed but honest effort, a view shared by PHS/SPCA. It can be viewed and credited, however, as partially responsible for fueling the public discussion on companion animal issues and overpopulation.
5. In 2003, PHS/SPCA formally announced the commitment to never again euthanize a healthy, adoptable dog or cat, a promise which has been and will continue to be kept. PHS/SPCA created its foster care program in 2003, formalizing the in-home care of underage and convalescing animals. Also that year, PHS/SPCA hired its first animal behaviorist, opening both an in-house and public animal behavior program which has expanded each year.
6. PHS/SPCA launched its mobile spay/neuter clinic in 2005, providing no-cost spay/neuter to the pets of low-income households in San Francisco and San Mateo counties.
7. PHS/SPCA opened its kitten nursery in 2008, an on-site facility providing critical nursing and medical care for abandoned kittens too young to be on their own away from their mothers.

Data is presented above for intervals over time to show the historical trend in successfully saving lives. Please note that the figures for each year since 2002 are included, and we need to make two points about that.

First, while as discussed above there's an amazing story to be told when reviewing the long term history of 1970 to the present (euthanasia of dogs and cats in this community reduced by 94.6%), there's also very clearly ongoing further measurable progress over these past several years: Comparing 2002 to the most recent completed calendar year (2008), PHS/SPCA has further reduced euthanasia in this community by 40%.

Second, effective 2002 PHS/SPCA starting tracking its statistics through a means called the Live Release Rate or LRR. PHS/SPCA was one of the early shelters promoting a means by which shelters could simply report the numbers of live animals exiting shelters (through all humane and appropriate means including adoption, return to original owners, transfer to other sheltering and rescue groups) of the numbers which entered those shelters. This simple LRR is, in our view, the best means of doing so.

PHS/SPCA's LIVE RELEASE RATE (LRR): California law (CA Penal Code 599d, elsewhere in State law further amended and expanded upon, sometimes referred to the Hayden Bill in honor of Assemblyman Tom Hayden who first introduced this legislation) divides companion animals (dogs, cats and the other small animals commonly kept as pets) in shelters into three major categories, as follows:

1. "**Healthy, adoptable**" animals are those "animals eight weeks of age or older that, at or subsequent to the time the animal is impounded or otherwise taken into possession, have manifested no sign of a behavioral or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and have manifested no sign of disease, injury, or congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the health of the animal or that is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future." The short version of the State's law boils down to this: Healthy, adoptable shelter animals are those who need nothing more than vaccination, sterilization, and a loving home.
2. The second category are those animals classed as "**treatable**" companion animals, defined as "any [companion] animal that is not adoptable but that could become adoptable with reasonable efforts." While one might have hoped for more specificity than this definition allows, the intent is clear: animals with a medical or behavioral problem, but not a problem so complex and/or expensive to treat that most of us wouldn't provide care if this animal was already in our home rather than at the shelter.

3. The final of the three categories, “**non-treatable**” companion animals are those with medical or behavioral conditions which would not likely or reasonably be addressed by any owner/guardian or any organization. These are the animals for whom euthanasia is the only humane solution, and sadly they too come to open door shelters in significant numbers. Sometimes they come as the very ill or very aged pets of people who trust the humane society to gently end the life of beloved companion. Sometimes they come as the victims of egregious, intentional cruelty, or unimaginable neglect. Sometimes they come as the victims of accidents. But the point is that they do come to those shelters which, like PHS/SPCA, accept all animals regardless of their health, behavior, age, background or even species. They come by the thousands.

As noted above, PHS/SPCA does not play games with these terms: in our shelter, a healthy and friendly 10 year old pit bull, as one example, is defined as a “healthy, adoptable” dog, and the same dog with, say, a broken leg is defined as a “treatable” dog. In some shelters, pit bulls are simply not accepted or, if allowed to enter the shelter, are immediately deemed “non-adoptable, non-treatable.”

Table 2: Live Release Rate (LRR) REPORTS, 2003-2008

2008 Calendar Year Live Release Rate

TYPE OF ANIMAL	Live animals received	Live animals placed	Healthy animals euthanized	Treatable animals euthanized	Non-treatable animals euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	2,955	2,401	-0-	60	494	81.3%
Cats	3,508	2,047	-0-	196	1,265	58.4%
Other pets	985	809	14	81	81	82.1%
TOTAL	7,448	5,257	14	337	1,840	70.6%

2007 Calendar Year Live Release Rate

TYPE OF ANIMAL	Live animals received	Live animals placed	Healthy animals euthanized	Treatable animals euthanized	Non-treatable animals euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	2,919	2,443	-0-	65	411	83.7%
Cats	3,847	2,028	-0-	439	1,380	52.7%
Other pets	1,196	835	24	153	184	69.8%
TOTAL	7,962	5,306	24	657	1,975	66.6%

2006 Calendar Year Live Release Rate

TYPE OF ANIMAL	Live animals received	Live animals placed	Healthy animals euthanized	Treatable animals euthanized	Non-treatable animals euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	3,074	2,432	-0-	66	576	79.1%
Cats	4,024	2,053	-0-	329	1,642	51.0%
Other pets	1,467	1,063	23	74	307	72.5%
TOTAL	8,565	5,548	23	469	2,525	64.8%

2005 Calendar Year Live Release Rate

TYPE OF ANIMAL	Live animals received	Live animals placed	Healthy animals euthanized	Treatable animals euthanized	Non-treatable animals euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	3,228	2,542	-0-	96	590	78.8%
Cats	4,131	2,111	-0-	348	1,672	51.1%
Other pets	1,350	1,033	18	71	228	76.5%
TOTAL	8,709	5,686	18	515	2,490	65.3%

2004 Calendar Year Live Release Rate

TYPE OF ANIMAL	Live animals received	Live animals placed	Healthy animals euthanized	Treatable animals euthanized	Non-treatable animals euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	3,057	2,413	-0-	139	505	78.9%
Cats	4,248	2,185	-0-	286	1,777	51.4%
Other pets	1,566	1,118	53	136	259	71.4%
TOTAL	8,871	5,716	53	561	2,541	64.4%

2003 Calendar Year Live Release Rate

TYPE OF ANIMAL	Live animals received	Live animals placed	Healthy animals euthanized	Treatable animals euthanized	Non-treatable animals euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	3,236	2,557	-0-	131	548	79.0%
Cats	4,866	2,167	-0-	623	2,076	44.5%
Other pets	1,858	994	74	189	601	53.5%
TOTAL	9,960	5,718	74	943	3,225	57.4%

NOTES:

- PHS/SPCA currently finds homes for far more “treatable” animals than it does “healthy, adoptable” animals, which reflects the fact that it receives – and then makes well – a greater number of animals who come to the shelter with a pre-existing medical or behavioral problem than those who come to us healthy and ready for adoption. To make this work possible, PHS/SPCA has become one of the largest employers of veterinarians and animal behavior professionals in the Bay Area, and relies heavily on tremendous support from over 1,300 active volunteers.
- Treatable animals euthanized are, of course, all available to other sheltering organizations and rescue groups, many of which are our valued partners in a combined community effort to save lives. The only companion animals currently euthanized at PHS/SPCA are animals for whom, at the present time, no other options are available.
- Without in any way discounting the extremely important help of these smaller groups, the numbers of animals from this community which end up in the care of other shelters and rescue groups is really very small; unlike most other California groups, PHS/SPCA is not only this community’s private non-profit humane organization but under contract with the County also provides state-mandated animal control services for the County and all of its 20 incorporated Cities. As such, in San Mateo County one can look at PHS/SPCA’s numbers and know the Live Release Rate. In most other communities, animal control is completely separate from the humane organization and those two sets of numbers – and in some communities even more than just two sets – must be gathered and compiled to get the complete story.
- These statistics do not include native wildlife. PHS/SPCA provides rehabilitation for injured and orphaned native wildlife for three counties: San Mateo County, northern Santa Clara County, and San Francisco City and County (birds only). In addition to the numbers above, in 2008 alone a total of 1,602 wild animals were made well and returned to their natural habitats by PHS/SPCA.
- Note that while the numbers vary in specific categories, there is a clear and measurable increase in PHS/SPCA’s Live Release Rate over these past several years.

BENCH-MARKING PHS/SPCA AGAINST OTHER SHELTERING ORGANIZATIONS: As noted above, it is very challenging to attempt to compare different shelters success rates. One glaring example as to why such a comparison is challenging, note that the single largest category of companion animals euthanized is “non-treatable cats.” A large sub-

category within that group is made up of those feral and under-socialized cats who come to us but for whom there are no feral cat caretakers available. As discussed earlier, quite a few shelters simply no longer count these cats as part of that organization's own LRR report.

If PHS/SPCA were to follow that practice, our LRR would increase. It wouldn't mean more animals saved, it would only mean a "better" number on the report. How meaningful is it, then, to compare PHS/SPCA's LRR with another shelter which does follow that practice?

There are, however, a number of national and regional estimates of LRR that are worth stacking up, recognizing that PHS/SPCA is not the source of any of these national or regional estimates. Here's what is out there:

- A number of years ago, without attribution as to source, a national estimate of 35% LRR (reduced to 30% LRR if "other" companion animals was added to the count) began to circulate. Recently, the national estimate one hears repeated is closer to 50% (again, with a drop of approximately 5% if rabbits, rodents and other smaller pet animals are included). Although a large range, the figure of 30-50% LRR is now the nationally discussed average.
- In 2006, the City of Los Angeles' Department of Animal Care and Control reported a California state-wide LRR for dogs and cats of 49%, reportedly basing that figure on data received from the California Department of Health Services. While no similar figure was reported for LRR including "other" companion animals, it is probably safe to assume the number would drop by at least another 5% if those animals were added to the calculation.
- In 2005, an informal survey of larger organizations (similar, in broad terms, to the scope and size of PHS/SPCA) through the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) website reported a national average of 44%.

From all the known reports and estimates, then, we see a national and California State average ranging from a low of 30% LRR to a high of 50% LRR. PHS/SPCA's own LRR (as shown above, along with contributing data) is over 70% and increasing each year.

A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MEASURE: Separate from the LRR, there is also a completely different measure also regularly referenced for shelters. Called either the "Kill Rate", "Euthanasia Rate," or "Euthanasia Per Capita Rate", the "Rate" is a simple mathematical formula of numbers of companion animals euthanized in all the shelters which serve an individual

community compared to the number of humans (in increments of one thousand) residing in that community.

Certainly some of the value of this system is in its simplicity. As it has been applied to date, one may however perceive a difficulty in the system in that the definition of "community" has not been consistently applied: some of the report has focused on individual cities, some on counties, some on states and some on multi-state regions. Regardless, shelters are occasionally asked for their "kill rate" or "euthanasia rate", and when asked this is the number that one is requesting.

The last report of which we are aware was produced in 2005, a document which compared the "euthanasia per capita" rates of close to 100 communities around the country. That report noted the lowest rate in the nation for Ithaca, New York (with a rate of 2.2) followed by San Francisco (2.5). The Navajo Nation ranked worst (with a rate of 136), and the worst in California was Visalia (81)

San Mateo County was not included in that 2005 report. Had we been, the rate would have been 3.9, making it the fourth lowest in the nation. The rate for 2008 has further improved, now down to 2.9.

SUMMARY: By any measure, PHS/SPCA is doing extremely well in its efforts to save lives. The credit belongs to a community which supports and embraces the mission, for a humane society is only as good as its community. And as its community expects and deserves, PHS/SPCA will continue to work towards the goal of further reducing euthanasia.