



Asked Questions about Euthanasia and No Kill

Q: Is the Animal Rescue League of Boston a No Kill shelter?

A: At the moment, the term No Kill doesn't have a standard, universally-accepted definition. When most people ask that question, they want to know:

- 1) If animals at our shelter have a time limit on how long they can stay, and
- 2) If our shelter euthanizes animals in order to create space for newly arriving animals.

The answer to those questions is no, ARL does not euthanize on the basis of length of stay, space, or breed.

Q: How does ARL manage its shelter population to avoid the use of euthanasia?

A: ARL has a flexible admissions policy. We take in animals based on our capacity to care for that particular animal and any physical health or behavioral issues an animal might have.

For instance, if we have a request to take in a food aggressive dog--a condition that is manageable but could make placing an animal in a home more difficult--and we already have several in the shelter, we will try to identify another shelter partner or breed-specific rescue organization that could take in the dog. We never want to put ourselves in the position of having more animals with complex needs to care for than we can reasonably help each day. If an alternate placement isn't currently available, we will put that animal on a wait-list for admission.

Sometimes, because of a complex medical or behavioral issue, an animal in our care cannot be placed in a home. Again, we will work to identify another program that could help. For cats that are unable to adapt to indoor life, for example, we work to place them in a barn cat program.

We also maintain a network of dedicated foster volunteers who can take home very young kittens and puppies who are too fragile for the animal shelter. These volunteers have specialized foster homes also provide more intensive, one-on-one care outside the shelter environment for animals who need to re-acclimate to living with people or are recovering from surgery.

Our flexible admissions policy does mean that we cannot immediately take in all animals in need, and we're always working on our capacity to try and help more

animals every day.

Q: What is ARL's position on using euthanasia for population control?

A: Unfortunately, the size of the homeless animal population outstrips the resources available to care for them in most communities right now, and this puts animals at risk.

The problem of unwanted pets is a community issue. Shelters are just one part of the solution. They can play an important role in building momentum for concerted spay/neuter efforts, cultivating relationships among public and private shelters to help animals find permanent homes, and developing more innovative approaches for fostering animals outside the animal shelter system.

But most shelters just do not have the resources to do all these things alone.

They need the support of local governments, municipalities, and individuals to humanely decrease the number of cats and dogs living outdoors and on the streets in our communities.

Q: How many animals did ARL euthanize in 2014?

A: In 2014, 2,732 cats taken in at ARL shelters, 357 were euthanized for humane reasons. Of the 881 dogs taken in, 64 were euthanized. This represents 13% and 7% of the total population brought in for care, respectively.

The percentages and total numbers represent a decline in euthanasia rates from 2013. Because of the broad scope of our Rescue Services and Law Enforcement programs, we take in high numbers of physically and behaviorally compromised animals. Animals from hoarding cases, for example, often have very serious health and behavior conditions due to neglect.

Despite our best efforts to treat the animals we take in, our numbers reflect our commitment to caring for animals as individuals and the recognition that there are times when euthanasia is the most compassionate, caring, and responsible course for the animal's well-being and for public health and safety.

Q: What does the future hold for the issue of euthanasia in animal welfare?

A: Interestingly, there is no standard, universally-accepted method for shelters to report the number of animals they euthanize at the moment. We endorse the current efforts of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators to discuss definitions and measurement tools, and attempt to build a consensus opinion on language around the issue of animals euthanized or turned away from animal shelters.

In the meantime, ARL will continue to pursue humane methods to decreasing the number of stray and homeless animals in Massachusetts through prevention with accessible, affordable spay/neuter services, and trap-neuter-release programs for feral cats.

We also will continue to find every animal in our care a safe and loving home as quickly as possible so that we can take in more animals in need.