



# GUIDELINES

## Veterinary Euthanasia

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<b>College Contact:</b>	Registrar
<b>References:</b>	CVMA Position Statement (December 2006): <a href="http://canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?ResourceID=34">http://canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?ResourceID=34</a>  AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia (June 2007): <a href="http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf">http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf</a> ;  Canadian Council on Animal Care Guidelines (1993), section XII: <a href="http://www.ccac.ca/en/CCAC_Programs/Guidelines_Policies/GUIDES/ENGLISH/toc_v1.htm">http://www.ccac.ca/en/CCAC_Programs/Guidelines_Policies/GUIDES/ENGLISH/toc_v1.htm</a>

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained.

## Purpose

This document is intended to provide guidance to veterinarians in Ontario regarding the practice of euthanasia on animals.

## Scope

This document applies to all veterinarians in Ontario who perform or oversee euthanasia on animals.

## Background

Veterinary euthanasia is a practice that deliberately ends the life of an animal, using humane methods.

The decision to euthanize is complex in that it often raises ethical dilemmas for practitioners and emotional responses in animal owners. These Guidelines have been developed as a reference for veterinarians on matters ranging from the generally technical to the interpersonal. Members are advised to seek details about technical methodologies in reference materials such as the Canadian Council on the Care of Animals (1993) and AVMA's *Guidelines on Euthanasia* (2007).

## Guidelines

### Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)

Euthanasia should be performed only in the context of a valid veterinary-client-patient relationship.<sup>1</sup> For cases that are presented to a member who is not the regular veterinarian (after hours or in emergency situations), the veterinarian should first establish a VCPR, determine reasons for the decision, and discuss options with the animal's owner/owner's agent.

### Communications

**Recommendation to Euthanize** Euthanasia is often one of several options a veterinarian presents to clients as a course of action in treating an animal. The client should be given associated options with all costs involved, with clear distinctions made regarding what is best for the animal and what consequences will result from each option. For cases wherein a veterinarian sees no recourse other than euthanasia, the opinion should be communicated to the client with sensitivity and compassion.

**Client Preparation** Communication on the subject with clients early in the VCPR is critical in order to minimize misunderstandings and misapprehensions during what is usually a very stressful event for the animal owner. Beginning the discussion about eventual euthanasia at a suitable point in the relationship minimizes the chance that the owner's values will diverge from the veterinarian's when a decision needs to be reached regarding an animal's situation.

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<sup>1</sup> The CVO recognizes that euthanasia of unwanted companion animals at animal shelters does occur, and that veterinarians who perform this service do so for the institutional client which owns said animals.

Once a decision to euthanize has been reached, the veterinarian should determine if the client wishes to be present during the procedures. If so, the following items need to be explained thoroughly to the client:

- the physical process of how the euthanasia is to be performed;
- the visible effects of any pharmaceutical agents used;
- the length of time each step may take;
- the anticipated restraint that the patient may experience; and
- any unavoidable after effects.

**Client Support** Veterinarians recognize the importance of the human-animal bond and are aware that loss of companion animals can lead to profound emotional reactions. Veterinarians and auxiliaries should offer appropriate support to their clients immediately after euthanasia has been performed. Examples for companion animal practice might include offering a room or space with relative privacy for clients to use afterwards, speaking with staff for a few minutes, helping arrange for transportation if the client is too distraught to drive or travel alone, and providing information on available counseling services in the area. Follow-up contact such as cards or phone-calls might also be used as means of assisting the client with the process.

**Client Rejection of Recommendation** Clients who refuse to euthanize an animal that will consequently suffer to the point where a report needs to be made to the OSPCA should be advised, where feasible, that the report will be made.

## Verification

**Ownership of Animal** The legal ownership of an animal must be established prior to the performance of euthanasia. Declaration of ownership should be part of the informed consent form.

**Informed Owner Consent** Clients should be asked to sign an informed owner consent document indicating that they have had reasonable treatment options presented to them, with benefits and prognoses explained for each, and that they grant permission for euthanasia before it is performed. Emergency situations that permit the veterinarian to act immediately (where authorized by appropriate legislation such as the *OSPCA Act*, *Animals for Research Act*, or *Food Quality and Safety Act*) to prevent undue suffering of the animal are exceptions to this requirement.

It is best to obtain written informed owner consent at all times. (See Appendix 2 for a sample form). For expediency in some situations, oral consent might be an appropriate course of action; this consent should be documented in the medical record. If oral consent is obtained over the telephone, it would be prudent to have it witnessed by a second person who asks it to be repeated to him/her and makes note of it in the medical record.

**Identification of Animal** Animal identification should be verified on-site before euthanasia occurs to avoid cases of mistaken identity. After the euthanasia, the animal's remains should be clearly identified.

## **Practice Policies**

Communication between and among veterinarians and staff is important to ensure that the veterinary team is clear on its policies and procedures, so that consistent information is given to clients.

Practitioners should maintain a euthanasia policy within their practices that clearly outlines the position of the practice and/or the veterinarians who work there. This policy should be developed and periodically reviewed with staff and made available to all clients at an appropriate point in the VCPR.

***Veterinarian and Staff Support*** It is important to recognize that involvement with euthanasia procedures may become difficult for veterinarians and staff over time. Veterinarians should be sensitive to associated issues faced by their staff as well as apprise themselves of resources available both to staff and to themselves for access to support as appropriate.

***Refusal to Perform Euthanasia*** Veterinarians who do not offer euthanasia as an option to clients who choose not to proceed with ongoing medical treatment(s) for their animal(s) should respectfully advise these clients of this fact at an appropriate point in the VCPR, and ensure they are not causing suffering to the animal by refusing to perform euthanasia. In all cases where the veterinarian refuses to perform euthanasia, including those where the client has requested the service for non-medical reasons, clients should be provided with options such as a referral to another veterinarian who has agreed to take such cases.

Veterinarians who offer the client an opportunity to surrender the animal to the practice for treatment and subsequent adoption rather than perform euthanasia should obtain written, informed consent from the client.

## **Performance of Service**

***Training*** All individuals who perform euthanasia must receive training as necessary to acquire and maintain adequate technical knowledge as well as interpersonal skills for this purpose.

***Auxiliaries*** Auxiliaries may carry out euthanasia under the immediate supervision<sup>2</sup> of a veterinarian, as long as they are sufficiently trained in both technical and interpersonal capacities for carrying out humane euthanasia. In some emergency situations, direct supervision may suffice.

***Methods*** The performance of euthanasia may be accomplished via a number of humane, scientifically and professionally acceptable, often species-specific means.

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<sup>2</sup> **Immediate supervision** means that the member is within sight or hearing of the auxiliary. **Direct Supervision** means that the member is on the same premises as the auxiliary but not necessarily within sight or hearing. **Indirect supervision** means that the member is in face to face communication with the auxiliary at least once per day on the days that the auxiliary is performing a delegated task, and that the member must be accessible in a timely and appropriate manner while the delegated task is being performed.

The CVO recommends that currently accepted best practices be followed. Practitioners should refer to guidelines such as those published by the Canadian Council on the Care of Animals and the AVMA—which are compiled and reviewed by expert scientists—for technical details. (See References on the first page of this document).

**Handling** Euthanasia should take place as soon as possible after the animal has arrived on-site for that purpose and been identified. In order to reduce pain, fear, and anxiety in the animal, handling should be minimized and appropriate to the circumstances for reasons of both animal welfare and practitioner safety. Euthanasia may be performed at a client's home for the same reason.<sup>3</sup>

## Disposal

**Restrictions** The *Environmental Protection Act*, the *Dead Animal Disposal Act*, and municipal by-laws determine whether or not burial or composting of animals is permitted. Veterinarians should advise clients who wish to bury or compost animals to confirm with their local authorities whether or not such means of disposal are available to them.

**Third-Party Providers** As a service to clients, veterinarians may contract with private cremation businesses and include disposal as an ancillary service, charging the client directly. Veterinarians are advised to ensure the third-party service provider so engaged runs an ethical operation, since clients will hold the veterinarian responsible for any problems that ensue regarding improper methods used. Veterinarians are not permitted to function as third-party service providers themselves (i.e., they cannot perform euthanasia as a service to a non-veterinarian company that uses the veterinarian as a third-party service provider.)

**Other Means of Disposal** If the veterinarian disposes of the remains, he or she needs to ensure that this is done in accordance with the provisions of the *Veterinarians Act* (e.g., disposal within 24 hours unless the body is frozen), the *Environmental Protection Act*, *Dead Animal Disposal Act*, municipal by-laws and other legal requirements.

## Medical Records and Security

Only veterinarians are authorized to handle or supervise the handling of controlled substances in the practice of veterinary medicine. Written protocols should be readily available to all those involved in handling, storing, and administering T-61, barbiturates or other drugs used for performing euthanasia.<sup>4</sup> These substances must be securely maintained in a locked cabinet. Veterinarians must maintain logs indicating the date of dispensing, amount used, a description of the animal for which it was used, and the amount remaining.

The patient medical record must contain the consent form, details about the method used, and instructions for the disposal of the animal.

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<sup>3</sup> To provide euthanasia services at a client's home, Companion Animal Mobile certification is not required if the euthanasia service is not a regular part of the practice and is not advertised, but is only negotiated between an individual client and the veterinarian on an as-needed basis.

<sup>4</sup> From former CVO Policy T-61 (incorporated into this Guideline document).

### Relevant Legislation

The *Veterinarians Act, 1989* is the profession specific *Act* which governs the practice of veterinarians in Ontario. O. Reg. 1093 is the regulation made under that *Act*. *The Minimum Standards for Veterinary Facilities* have the status of law. The *Health Protection and Promotion Act* refers to veterinarians and their obligations regarding communicable diseases.

The following excerpts from the above legislative documents pertain to this Guideline document and are reproduced here for ease of reference.

#### **General:**

O. Reg. 1093, Section 18 states that

A member shall exercise generally accepted standards of practice and procedures in the performance of veterinary services. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093, s. 18.

#### **Regarding disposal of animals:**

O. Reg. 1093, Section 17 states that professional misconduct includes:

21. Failing to dispose of an animal, whether deceased or alive, or a part of it, in accordance with the client's instructions if those instructions are in accordance with accepted veterinary standards and practice.
22. Disposing of an animal, whether deceased or alive, or a part of it, by any means that are not in accordance with accepted veterinary standards and practice, if the client does not give instructions regarding such disposal or gives instructions that are not in accordance with accepted veterinary standards and practice.
  - 22.1 Failing to dispose of biological, pathological or hazardous wastes in accordance with the requirements of the *Environmental Protection Act* or, if there are no such requirements, in accordance with accepted veterinary standards and practice.

Minimum Standards for Veterinary Facilities include clauses pertaining to disposal of animal remains as follows:

Titles 1-3, 5, 6, 12.1, and 12.2 state (under "Housekeeping") that:

*13.4 Carcasses are disposed of within 24 hours unless frozen.*

Title 4 also states (under "Housekeeping") that:

*12.3 Carcasses are disposed of within 24 hours unless frozen.*

Note: Titles 7-11 do not refer to disposal of carcasses.

**Regarding Controlled Substances:**

Ontario Regulation 1093, Section 28 states

- (2) A member shall,
  - (a) protect controlled substances, ketamine and targeted drugs in his or her possession from loss and theft; and
  - (b) report any loss or theft of controlled substances, ketamine or targeted drugs in his or her possession to,
    - (i) a police officer immediately, and
    - (ii) the Minister of Health, Canada, within 10 days of discovering the loss or theft. O. Reg. 161/04, s. 16 (2).
- (3) A member shall not permit any person, other than another member or an auxiliary acting upon the specific direction of a member, to dispense or have access to the controlled substances, ketamine or targeted drugs in the member's possession. O. Reg. 161/04, s. 16 (2).
- (4) A member shall ensure that the controlled substances, ketamine and targeted drugs in his or her possession are kept in a locked cabinet designed and constructed to ensure the reasonable security of the drugs. O. Reg. 161/04, s. 16 (2).
- (5) The cabinet mentioned in subsection (4) shall be kept locked except when drugs are being placed in or removed from the cabinet. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093, s. 28 (5).
- (6) A member shall not prescribe or dispense a controlled substance, ketamine or a targeted drug unless,
  - (a) the animal for which the controlled substance, ketamine or targeted drug is prescribed or dispensed is an animal under his or her professional treatment; and
  - (b) the controlled substance, ketamine or targeted drug is required for a condition for which the animal is receiving treatment from the member. O. Reg. 161/04, s. 16 (2).

**Regarding T-61 and non-veterinarians:**

Section 33(2) states that no member shall,

- (f) dispense pharmaceutical product T-61 except if it is for administration by a member or a person who is known to the member to be competent in the humane administration of euthanasia and aware of the advisability of administering sedation to the animal before administering the product and who,
  - (i) is an auxiliary of the member acting upon the specific direction of the member, or
  - (ii) is carrying out euthanasia procedures on animals, including wild animals, while,
    - (a) operating, or being employed by a person operating, a pound or research facility within the meaning of the *Animals for Research Act*,

- (b) being employed by the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or an affiliate of the Society, or
- (c) acting as a wildlife custodian within the meaning of section 44 of the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997*. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093, s. 33 (2); O. Reg. 407/92, s. 5; O. Reg. 161/04, s. 19 (2); O. Reg. 398/07, s. 14.

***Regarding medical records:***

**Ont. Reg 1093, Section 27 states**

- (1) A member who dispenses a drug shall make a written record showing,
  - (a) the name and address of the owner of the animal or group of animals for which the drug is prescribed;
  - (b) the name, strength and quantity of the prescribed drug;
  - (c) the directions for use if they are different than the directions for use on the manufacturer's label or if the manufacturer's label does not specify the directions for use;
  - (d) the date on which the drug is dispensed; and
  - (e) the price charged. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093, s. 27 (1).
- (2) The member shall retain the written record required under subsection (1) for a period of at least five years or until he or she ceases to practice veterinary medicine, whichever occurs first. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093, s. 27 (2).

**Ontario Regulation 1093, Section 28 states**

- (1) A member who dispenses a controlled substance, ketamine or a targeted drug shall keep a controlled substances register in which is entered,
  - (a) the date of the dispensing;
  - (b) the name and address of the owner of the animal or animals for which the drug was dispensed;
  - (c) the name, strength and quantity of the drug dispensed; and
  - (d) the quantity of the drug remaining after dispensing. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093, s. 28 (1); O. Reg. 510/95, s. 7; O. Reg. 161/04, s. 16 (1); O. Reg. 398/07, s. 12.

***Regarding exceptions to requirement for owner consent:***

**The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) Act states:**

Sec.14 (2) An inspector or an agent of the Society may destroy an animal,

- (a) with the consent of the owner; or
- (b) where a veterinarian has examined the animal and has advised the inspector or agent

in writing that the animal is ill or injured and, in his or her opinion, is incapable of being so cured or healed as to live thereafter without suffering.

*[Note: this clause was brought before the Ontario Legislature for amendment in 2008; changes pending].*

**The Animals for Research Act states:**

**Redemption period**

20. (1) The minimum redemption period shall be three days, excluding the day on which the dog or cat was impounded, or such longer period as the regulations prescribe and holidays shall not be included in calculating any redemption period.

**Order for destruction of dog or cat**

- (11) An inspector or veterinarian may order a dog or cat to be destroyed,
- (a) where, during the redemption period, the dog or cat is in a pound and is ill or injured and, in the opinion of the inspector or veterinarian, is incapable of being so cured or healed as to live thereafter without suffering; or
  - (b) where the dog or cat,
    - (i) is in a pound, supply facility or research facility,
    - (ii) has not, where it is in a pound, been redeemed by its owner within the redemption period, and
    - (iii) is, in the opinion of the inspector or veterinarian, not suitable for use in research by reason of ill health, injury, malnutrition, excessive age or other infirmity.

**The Livestock Community Sales Act, s. 16(3), states:**

16. (3) Subject to subsections (4), (5), and (6), the Director or an inspector may, for the purpose of carrying out his or her duties under this Act,

- (c) in accordance with the regulations, seize, remove, detain and provide for the disposal of any livestock where,
  - (i) he or she believes on reasonable and probable grounds that there is a contravention of this Act or the regulations in respect thereof, or
  - (ii) it appears to him or her that the livestock is diseased, injured, or shows evidence of any other abnormal condition;
- (d) order livestock mentioned in subclause (c)(ii) to be destroyed,
  - (i) with the consent of the owner, or
  - (ii) where a veterinarian has examined the livestock and has advised the Director or inspector in writing that the livestock is diseased, injured or suffers from any other abnormal condition and, in the veterinarian's opinion, is incapable of being so cured, healed or treated as to live thereafter without suffering.

The Food Safety and Quality Act, Regulation 35/01, s. 84.1 (1), states:

84.1(1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a regional veterinarian may provisionally authorize the slaughter of a food animal outside of a slaughter plant if he or she has no reason to believe the animal is unfit for slaughter and, in his or her opinion, the slaughter outside of a slaughter plant is necessary because the food animal,

- (a) has escaped confinement;
- (b) cannot be transported to a slaughter plant without endangering the safety of the animal or any person; or
- (c) is injured and cannot be transported to a slaughter plant without causing it undue suffering or distress.

The Health Protection and Promotion Act, Regulation 557, states:

3. (2) A medical officer of health who is of the opinion that a dog or cat may be rabid shall cause the dog or cat to be confined and isolated for at least ten days from all animals and persons, except the person caring for the dog or cat,

- (a) at the place of residence of the person caring for the dog or cat, if the dog or cat is free from symptoms of any disease; or
- (b) in a pound or veterinary hospital at the expense of the municipality in which the person caring for the dog or cat resides if the dog or cat exhibits symptoms of any disease or if, in the opinion of the medical officer of health, the person is unlikely to confine and isolate the dog or cat. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 557, s. 3 (2).

(3) Despite subsection (2), the medical officer of health,

- (a) may require the detention of a dog or cat for the purpose of a veterinary examination for evidence of rabies and based on the results of the examination may cause the dog or cat to be confined and isolated for such period as is necessary to determine that the dog or cat is free from symptoms of rabies; or
- (b) may require the destruction of any animal at any time for the purpose of having a laboratory examination to determine if the animal is in the infective stage of rabies. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 557, s. 3 (3).

(4) In the case of a dog or cat, clause (3) (b) only applies where the dog or cat is unclaimed or where permission is given by the owner for the destruction of the dog or cat. R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 557, s. 3 (4).

## APPENDIX 2

### [SAMPLE] Owner Consent and Request to Perform Euthanasia

I am the owner / agent of the owner of the animal(s) identified below, and I have the authority to give this consent.

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ has described the nature of the euthanasia procedure and has explained to my satisfaction the purpose for performing it and the likely consequences of not having it performed (including the prognosis, risks, benefits and side-effects of any viable treatment options).

For humane reasons, I hereby consent to, and order, Euthanasia to be performed on the animal described below.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this animal has not bitten any person during the 10 days preceding today's date.\*

I have read and fully understand this form and declare that I voluntarily provide my informed consent.

Owner/Agent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

#### DETAILS of ANIMAL

Identification: \_\_\_\_\_

Species: \_\_\_\_\_ Breed: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Colour: \_\_\_\_\_

**Remarks:**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of owner/agent

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of veterinarian

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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\* This is necessary to ensure the animal is not carrying rabies, since the accepted incubation period is 10 days.