

Las Cruces animal shelter improving, but not perfect yet

By Diana M. Alba Sun-News reporter

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LAS CRUCES - Pet euthanasias are down, but still too high, one official reported Thursday.

The rate dropped from about 67 percent of animals brought to the shelter, down to 62 percent last year, according to Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley. Roughly 10,400 animals were euthanized by the city-county animal shelter two years ago, while 9,300 were euthanized last year.

"When I came in 2008, it was probably 70 percent," Vesco-Mock said. "We've probably dropped it 10 percent. We've made a lot of strides."

Vesco-Mock attributed the decline to more adoptions and a greater number of pets being returned to owners or sent to rescue organizations and foster homes. Still, she said, the heart of the problem remains. Large numbers of animals continue to pour into the facility, compared to other communities.

Vesco-Mock said about 75.3 animals per every 1,000 county residents are passing through the shelter's doors, about "three times the national average." Bernalillo County's rate sits about 42 animals per 1,000 people, while Los Angeles intakes about 5.5, she said.

"I just can't out-adopt this problem," she said.

Vesco-Mock presented her annual report to the shelter's governing board Thursday.

Frank Bryce, with the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, noted that efforts of several animal welfare groups in recent years are helping to improve numbers.

Board Chairman Miguel Silva, also a city councilor, concurred.

"Everyone is working on this together," he said.

Vesco-Mock said the long-term goal of reducing pet overpopulation and euthanasias will depend upon public outreach. People will have to understand that the spaying and neutering their animals is a must, she said. That's one aim of a school program she's implemented.

"We need to educate every single household, not just children," she said.

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Animals taken into the shelter

(2008/2009)

- Dogs: 8,790/8,108
- Cats: 6,316/6,468
- Birds: (livestock) 124/580
- Rabbits: 101/84
- Wildlife: 74/141
- Pocket pets: 61/40
- Livestock (excluding fowl): 45/21
- Birds (non-livestock) : 6/6
- Reptiles: 6/24
- Other: 0/2

Source: Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley report