

Fewer animals killed at shelter

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LAS CRUCES - The good news? Fewer dogs and cats are being killed at the city-county animal shelter, according to a year-end report released Thursday.

But the bad news is that overall numbers of animals going into the facility haven't dropped much, shelter director Beth Vesco-Mock said.

The euthanasia rate dropped from 60.2 percent of shelter animals in 2009 to 55.8 percent last year, numbers that don't include euthanasia carried out at the request of pet owners, according to the report.

In all, 8,347 animals were killed at the facility in 2010.

Behind the drop were increases in pet adoptions and increases in the number of animals being reunited with owners, Vesco-Mock said.

That's positive, though further work remains to be done in the community, said Louise Tracey-Hosa, president of the Doña Ana County Humane Society, a nonprofit not directly connected to the shelter.

"We're headed in the right direction," she said. "I'm very encouraged."

The number of animals euthanized per 1,000 residents has dropped, from 51.9 in 2008, when Vesco-Mock became director, to 39.9 last year, she said. The national average is 10.2.

Some 19.3 percent of euthanasias were due to animals - mostly cats - being feral, according to the report. Another 19.2 percent were because of upper respiratory illnesses. Those were the two largest categories.

After hearing the report, Linda Hall, vice president of ACTION Programs for Animals, said she's disappointed officials aren't promoting a trap-and-release ordinance for the county. Such a measure would allow for the establishment of feral cat colonies.

"That is such a huge amount of what we're euthanizing at our shelter," she said.

The shelter, called the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, takes in stray animals from across the county, which has struggled for years with pet overpopulation.

Intake high

In all, 14,961 animals were taken in last year, according to the report. That was 99 fewer - less than a 1 percent drop - from the previous year.

That's troublesome, Vesco-Mock said, because Albuquerque and El Paso shelters see far fewer animals entering their doors.

Among animals taken in, about 43.9 percent originated from the city, while 48.5 percent were from the unincorporated areas of the county. The remainder were animals dropped off by people in cages in front of the shelter during off hours, officials said, so the jurisdiction isn't known.

To continue improving, community outreach is needed to promote responsible pet ownership, Vesco-Mock said. She said affordable spay-neuter surgeries and medical treatment also are important.

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