

# The Emotional Impact of the Animal Control Profession



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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Rationale for Selection .....	1
Just Another Day .....	1
Significance of the Topic .....	2
Delimitations .....	3
Organization .....	3
Research.....	5
Research of the Literature .....	5
History of Animal Control .....	5
Handling the Emotions.....	6
Animal Cruelty .....	7
Legal.....	9
Mental Health.....	13
Human Resource Management .....	14
Survey Research.....	16
Interviews.....	16
Interview One.....	16
Interview Two.....	17
Interview Three.....	19
Interview Four.....	21
Interview Five .....	23
Interview Six.....	25
Interview Seven .....	28
Interview Eight.....	30
Survey Information One .....	32
Survey Information Two.....	33
Application.....	36
Steps to Implement the Change.....	36
Step One.....	36
Step Two .....	37

## Table of Contents

Projected Cost of Change.....	37
Projected Benefits .....	38
Measurable .....	38
Immeasurable .....	38
Suggested Follow-up Action.....	39
Conclusion .....	40
Summary .....	40
Personal Learning .....	41
Appendix A.....	42
Appendix B .....	44
Appendix C .....	46
Appendix D.....	51
References.....	52
Pledge.....	54

## INTRODUCTION

### *Rationale for Selection*

I have chosen to study the emotional and mental impact the animal control profession has on individuals that actually work in the field of animal control. This topic is personal to me because I am in fact in the animal control profession. The animal control profession itself is important to me because I have devoted many years to improving the relationship with animals and people. The animal control profession has had an emotional and mental impact on my life and I wish to explore it further in my research.

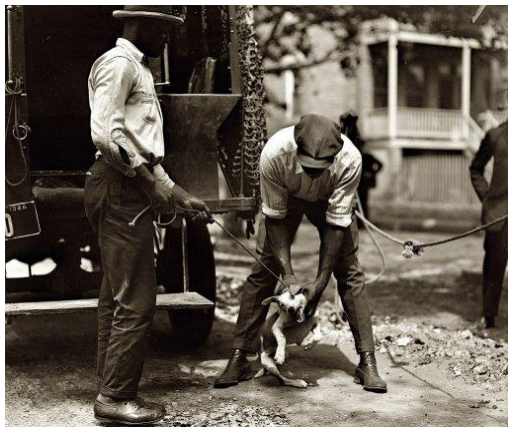
*Just another day.* July 29, 2007 should have started out just like any other ordinary day in the life of an animal control officer. As we all know, however, the animal control world isn't always ordinary. On that day, I was given the task of investigating a snake bite. Ok, easy enough, Chesterfield County Animal Control doesn't routinely handle snake bites. It turns out this would be anything but routine, since the snake in question was a highly venomous albino monocle cobra. The cobra, a juvenile one, belonged to the very person it bit. It seems this young adult had been up very late the night before and may have consumed a bit too much alcohol. His bold, but irresponsible, handling of the snake led to his injury. He was bitten on his pinky finger and, as a result, spent the next several days in the hospital. Although not used in this situation, anti-venom was flown in from Florida. This case was handled in a very professional manner; including members of animal control, police, and the rescue squad. A search warrant was executed on the snake owner's apartment, the snake (in the cage) was safely removed, and the snake owner lived to see another day. That day included a September 19, 2007 court hearing for violation of Chesterfield County's exotic animal ordinance. This was just another day in the exciting world of animal control.

I have never been in the situation of having to handle something as serious as this potentially could have been. There was a level of apprehension and uncertainty on my part. For some individuals, handling this type of situation may have caused a sense of fear as I experienced. I also wanted to make sure this entire operation was handled smoothly and correctly. Therefore, there was a level of anxiety at making sure this situation was handled properly. In the end, the venomous snake case was handled professionally and efficiently despite the emotional roller coaster I felt.

I am currently the Assistant Supervisor for the Animal Control Division of the Chesterfield County Police Department. I have been in the animal control section with Chesterfield County since December 1991. Prior to that, I worked at a local animal hospital for a few years. I have been a part of many investigations and incidents as they relate to animals. Therefore, my experiences with people and animals are long and extensive.

### *Significance of the Topic*

The animal control profession is a field of work that is often misunderstood. In the past, we were considered “dog catchers.” This early photo of “dog catchers” represents the historical physical difficulties that many of us currently face each day. To this day, those of us in the



animal control profession still routinely face the stereotype of the “dog catcher” mentality.

The animal control profession has grown significantly since 1924 and has brought many challenges with it.

*Washington, D.C., 1924. "Dog catchers." National Photo Co*

These challenges are both physical and emotional. It's relatively easy to look at and measure the physical implications of the animal control job. For example, those of us in the animal control profession that have been bitten by a cat or dog, sprained an ankle chasing a dog, or have been exposed to the feces and urine in an animal hoarder's home can easily explain the physical aspect. We can readily tell someone about the punctures from the dog or cat bite, the pain from the twisted ankle, or the awful smell of the animal hoarder's home. How, though, do we explain or convey the emotional aspects of these experiences in animal control?

Thus, my topic is important because animal control professionals may experience different emotions for very similar situations we are involved in. For example, I may feel anger toward an animal cruelty situation while another animal control professional may feel profound sadness. Or, I could be irritated at a dog owner letting their dog run loose while another animal control professional might be relieved because they were able to return the dog to its rightful owner. These are just a couple of examples of what we may feel or experience in our line of work.

### *Delimitations*

My focus will primarily look at what the emotional impact this profession of animal control has on people. The physical aspects of this job will be looked at only in how it relates to the emotional part. I plan to interview individuals in this profession, such as animal control officers, humane investigators, and support staff. I also plan to talk with individuals that are not directly in the field of animal control but may have an impact on the profession. This would include such individuals as human resource personnel, mental health professionals, and lawyers. I hope to discover ways in my research that will help individuals and groups in the animal control profession as it relates to the emotional and mental impact of our jobs.

### *Organization*

The Chesterfield County Police Department is located just south of Richmond, Virginia. It has been formally in existence since 1924 and covers an area of approximately 446 square miles. The police department serves a current population of over 300,000 citizens.

Chesterfield County Animal Control is a division of the Operational Support Bureau of the police department. Animal Control is responsible for the enforcement of county and state laws pertaining to animals. The animal control division is comprised of supervisory personnel, animal control officers, kennel workers, and office staff. Some of the duties include animal cruelty investigations, care of animals in the shelter, and adoption of pets.



## Research

### *Research of the Literature*

#### *History of Animal Control*

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, a dog catcher is defined as, “a community official assigned to catch and dispose of stray dogs” (Dogcatcher, 2008). Amazingly enough, this entry first originated in the dictionary in 1835. Famous movies, such as *Lady and the Tramp*, portrayed “dog catchers” in a very negative light. Sadly, though, early “dog catchers” did not give a positive image of a profession that serves a greater good. In fact, in 1894, in New York City, the dog pound was (To Catch Dogs Politely, 1894)

abolished, and brutal dog catchers are a thing of the past. Said John P. Haines, the

President of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, yesterday:

“You will not read any more complaints in the newspapers that Mrs. or Miss So and So has been knocked in the breast and has had her pet dog taken away from her by force.”

The article continues with, “Many of the dog catchers were recruited from the roughest classes, and outrageous seizures of dogs that were torn away from their helpless mistresses in the streets were frequently made” (ibid.).

We have come a long way from those bygone days of early animal controlling. The animal control profession has become better and more organized. For example, most states have mandated training for animal control officers and laws regarding animal care and control continue to improve. The animal control profession even has a national association. On September 27, 1978 the National Animal Control Association (NACA) was formed at a meeting in Englewood, Colorado. The purpose of this new organization “was and is to provide training for all those involved with animal regulatory agencies and to provide a means for communication

between all agencies involved with animals throughout the world, i.e., create a worldwide source of information for its member use” (National Animal Control Association, 2008).

### *Handling the Emotions*

I began my professional career in the animal control business more than 17 years ago. I was young, eager, and ready to put my mark on the world. I knew the job I had started would most certainly be a physical one. I understood the possibilities of getting bitten, lifting large dogs, scraping my elbow, or even working in the extremes of the weather. What I didn't realize was the emotional impact the business of animal control would have on me. It's only been just recently that I have been able to grasp the impact this career has had on my emotional well-being.

How then do we decide what emotions to feel? Do we all feel the same emotions? There are many theories as to what might be the basic set of emotions that humans feel. However, “psychological theorists speak of a set of fundamental human emotions that are universal, discrete, and which they consider innate” (Masson & McCarthy, 1995, p. 10). These feelings, such as love, hate, fear, sorrow, anger or joy, are just a few of the many that animal control professionals may experience from day to day.

Animal control professionals are involved in a multitude of situations related to animals and people. For example, on February 4, 2009, I had to respond to a suicide situation. Along with me was an animal control officer in training who had not experienced this type of a situation. Those individuals not in the animal control profession may not understand why we would be involved with a suicide incident. The reason was simple. The female who had committed suicide also had two small dogs. Even more chilling was that she had a young child in school that was completely unaware of what had occurred. Animal Control was asked to

respond to get these two dogs and temporarily care for them. We arrived at the scene where we met the police officers handling this situation. The police officer told us that we would not need to help because they had just made contact with a family member who would be able to care for the dogs. Although the animal control officer I am training had not dealt with a suicide situation, I had. Therefore, I was exceptionally thankful that we would not have to go inside and thus witness the horror that had taken place within this residence. My trainee and I discussed this incident at length and attempted to rationalize it as best we could. What would drive an individual to do something like this and how the child would respond were just a few of the many questions we posed to ourselves. While we did not have to actually see the suicide scene on this particular case, the emotions of it still had an impact. Feelings such as sadness and anger were interlaced within my conversations with my animal control trainee.

Are these situations just for me? No, there are others within the animal control profession that experience trying situations. Take for example Officer Donna W. Levine of Fulton County, Georgia. She took command of the cruelty investigations because the other investigator left, “unable to stomach the horrors of animal abuse any longer” (Warhop, 2006). What is interesting to note, is that Officer Levine is a regular person just like anyone else. She is “35, has three kids, two dogs and a cat” (ibid.). Warhop goes on to say that, “She has an infectious, girlish laugh and, despite her height and age, looks too young and too pretty to be tough enough for the horrors of this job” (ibid.).

There is a similarity in Officer Levine that I see within myself. When she first started, she had to fight an “instinctual urge to ‘go upside somebody’s head’” when she confronted these cases. Now, she’s more even-tempered. To a point. “It takes a real big emotional toll on you,”

she admits” (ibid.). I believe this emotional toll can have a dramatic effect on an individual’s ability to cope and make good decisions. For some, this toll may be too much to bear at times.

*Animal cruelty.* Officer Levine tells a story about a puppy that had an embedded collar in its neck. This is a horrible situation where the collar remains the same size while the dog continues to grow. The collar becomes embedded as the skin and flesh expand around it. It is a very painful and serious situation for an animal. The puppy was brought to a veterinarian by another officer other than Levine. The veterinarian had to remove the metal collar link by link from the puppy’s neck. She describes the situation saying (ibid.),

“the puppy just sat there so cool and so calm, just so patient, and the officer that took him stood there the whole time just to make sure that the puppy was going to be okay. And the puppy just looked him in the face the whole time.” The officer wept.

Animal cruelty has various interpretations and is looked at differently from state to state. The state of Virginia has a lengthy animal cruelty statute that has evolved and improved over the course of my 17 years in this profession. The cruelty statute for Virginia provides the guidelines for animal control professionals to pursue criminal charges against individuals (see Appendix A).

Animal cruelty doesn’t just occur in the United States. It has no borders and knows no boundaries. Humans have an uncanny knack for treating the animal world poorly and inhumanely. It can be shocking and quite disturbing to many, including the animal control professionals that must investigate these situations. For example, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) provides this chilling story.

Chad Sisneros, The HSUS’s video director, recalls the night in Manila when police pulled over a truck driver suspected of involvement in the illegal dog meat trade, which was under investigation by the Humane Society International and Philippine animal welfare groups. The sight that greeted him as he filmed remains indelible in his mind. “The heat and the smell coming from the truck were just incredible,” he says. “Crammed inside were about 100 dogs—mangy, scrawny, scared to death. Their muzzles were tied

with rubber or plastic to stop them from barking. They were the lucky ones. At the dog meat market, we filmed the awful fate they were saved from” (Satchell, 2009, p. 18)

This type of exposure can be traumatic for many. I agree with the idea of the HSUS in that, “the emotional burden and the constant exposure to animal suffering that weighs most heavily” (ibid., p.18).

Every so often we are confronted with an abundance and sometimes unusual set of circumstances involving animals. Just before Christmas in 2008, Bedford County Animal Control in Virginia handled in their facility approximately three dozen roosters. “The sheriff’s office seized the 39 chickens from a Coleman Falls farmer accused of selling two fighting birds to undercover officers for \$100 apiece” (Harvey, 2009). This flood of animals can prove to be stressful at times as animal control personnel attempt to safely care for large numbers of animals. According to the shelter’s operation manager, Scott Polinek, “such a sizeable influx was a new experience for the facility” (ibid.).

We enter a dilemma of sorts because of “the *freedom* of individuals and society to do what they want with animals, and the freedom we presently enjoy to make of animals what we will” (Tester, 1991, p. 196). Animal cruelty and legislation that has resulted is because, “Animals have been made moral subjects because society demands that they be made moral subjects for *purely social reasons*” (ibid.,p.207).

*Legal.* The impact of the legal system can have either a positive or negative impact on an animal control professional. Animal control professionals routinely enforce laws and must adhere to the same rules of law as a police officer. Search and seizure, Miranda warnings, and criminal warrants are just a few issues that those in the animal control profession must be familiar with.

I spoke about the legal aspects and how they might affect an animal control professional with Robert J. Fierro, Jr., Assistant Commonwealth Attorney for Chesterfield County. There is no doubt that there is a passion for animal welfare—people care! Regrettably, as he pointed out, there seems to be a lower priority on animal cases as they are often considered less desirable (Fierro Jr, 2009). In addition to this are the lower forms of punishments that are typically associated with animal cases. For example, the prosecution of a running at large case involving a dog, while considered a criminal offense, only involves the possibility of a minor fine.

Chesterfield County Animal Control enjoys a very positive working relationship with the Chesterfield Commonwealth Attorney's Office. This may not always be the case for other animal control agencies. Fierro stated that some smaller jurisdictions may not always have a prosecutor present when animal cases are being handled (*ibid.*). This alone would pose a level of disappointment and frustration for an animal control professional.

We also discussed the often frustrating disparity that involves the punishment of certain situations involving animals. Fierro specifically mentioned vicious dog cases. Under Virginia law, a dog declared vicious by a court must be euthanized. A terrible incident may have occurred, yet the family pet gets the ultimate form of punishment—a death sentence! The dog owner may receive little if anything in the form of punishment and it is often in the form of only a civil penalty. The failure of the owner costs the life of the dog (*ibid.*).

This doesn't lessen the impact, though, these cases have on people. For example, in Chicago, "a boy died Sunday afternoon [Jan 11] after he was mauled by his family's Rottweiler in the backyard of their home on the Southwest Side" (Wang & Williams-Harris, 2009). This type of situation is horrific and difficult for all involved. The emotions of dealing with a tragic incident can weigh heavily on the mind of an animal control professional.

Issues related to dangerous or vicious dogs can sometimes spark legislative action such as breed specific bans. In Ohio, there is “a 1987 state law requiring owners to confine purebred pit bulls as “vicious dogs” and buy at least \$100,000 in liability insurance” (Cities mull pit bull bans, 2009). The scene is similar in Denver, Colorado. In, “2005 local authorities began enforcing a law making it illegal to have a Pit Bull as a pet” (Winograd, 2007, pp. 142-143). However, there are twelve states that “prohibit specific restrictions and bans” (Cities mull pit bull bans, 2009). Virginia is one of those states. Breed specific legislation may raise constitutional questions (Handy, 2001, p. 7).

First, because all types of dogs may inflict injury to people and property, ordinances addressing only one breed of dog appear to be underinclusive and, therefore, violate owners’ equal protection rights; and second, because identification of a dog’s breed with the certainty necessary to impose sanctions on the dog’s owner is impossible, such ordinances have been considered unconstitutionally vague, and therefore, to violate due process

In the middle of this are the animal control professionals that must enforce the laws that are passed. Some laws, such as breed specific ones, can be frustrating to enforce as the animal control officer must make a decision solely on the breed of a dog.

The issue of animal hoarding and the neglect that occurs is a sensitive topic. Fierro stated this type of situation was a “tough one from a legal standpoint” (Fierro Jr, 2009). There is a certain element of mental illness that frequently is at play in neglect situations involving animal hoarders. While the intentions of the animal owner are well-meaning, the capabilities of properly caring for the animals go far beyond their means. From an animal control professional standpoint, it can be emotionally challenging. Fierro said it well, that we “feel empathy” toward

the animal owner, however, must also balance this with the law enforcement and legal aspect of these cases (ibid.).

The issue of law enforcement is one that continues to grow for animal control professionals. Animal control officers are frequently tasked with issuing summons or citations for animal related issues. In Columbus, Ohio, for example, animal control officers have seen an increase in ticket writing, especially in October 2008. “Officers cited 56 dogs for no city licenses during the month, a 331 percent jump from 13 dogs cited in October 2007” (Osborn, 2009). Columbus, Ohio saw an increase for overall citations of no dog licenses with a total of 227 “through the first 10 months of last year, a 49 percent increase from the citations issued in 2007” (ibid.). This adds stress to an animal control professional as they must keep up with the law enforcement aspect as well as the increased risk of confrontation with an upset pet owner.

Animal control professionals are increasingly placed in situations where the laws must be enforced, however, the situation is often unpleasant. Take for example the laws regarding animal feces removal in Seattle, Washington. This type of ordinance is commonly referred to as a “pooper-scooper” law. As a result, “there are numerous confrontations between neighbors, between dog owners and animal-control officers, and between dog owners and passers-by” (Lacitis, 2009). For example, this situation in Seattle (ibid.),

Nov.8, 2007 in Magnolia Manor Park: A woman solved the matter of not wanting to accept poop-scoop and other citations by loading her two dogs into her car. She faced the animal-control officer, the report said, and “deliberately pushed me out of the way with her vehicle...and then fled the scene.”

These types of confrontations can weigh heavily on the mind of an animal control professional.



*Mental health.* The job of animal care and control can be very demanding. In many cases, “this means having too much to do in too little time” (Figley & Roop, 2006, p. 18). There can frequently be stressors that make the life of an animal control professional challenging. These may “include being in physical danger from aggressive or sick animals or owners or being exposed to poor, unhealthy, and even dangerous working conditions” (ibid, p.18).

I spoke with Karl Kalber, Prevention Consultant for the Department of Mental Health Support Services for Chesterfield County. We discussed the aspects of stress and mental health issues as they pertain to animal control professionals. He spoke about the stressors of animal control that are typically expected (Kalber, 2009). These might include such things as an aggressive dog or an injured animal. These situations create a level of stress that may be expected in this line of work. However, he also pointed out the stressors that we might not expect would occur in this profession (ibid.). This might include such situations as removal of animals from a suicide situation or being the first responder to see evidence of a child abuse situation. All of these situations, expected or not, create stress for an animal control professional.

Kalber stated that while animal control professionals “may have a conflict with individuals in the course of your jobs, you must maintain a professional demeanor” (ibid.). Men, he stated, “have a harder time with verbal conflict than women” (ibid.). Men are typically more comfortable with the physical aspects of the job than women. Therefore, women generally attempt to resolve the conflicts more so through communication (ibid.). Despite these differences, though, as the stress level increases men and women alike must remain calm. It can be a challenge to an individual’s emotional stability.

The onslaught of a stressful situation can take its “toll in many ways, some of them as straightforward as a “tension headache” or “a pain in the neck,” others as stealthy as chronic depression or menstrual irregularities” (Spera & Lanto, 1997, p. 6). Why then would an individual join the animal control profession? Surely we must know that there will be a great deal of stress we’ll have to endure.

Kalber asked me why I had gotten into the field of animal control. I told him that I’ve been involved with animals almost my entire life. What about those in this profession having a different outlook? Are these individuals any less qualified and how do they cope with the issues of animal control. He also asked about “what personalities would make a good animal control officer” (Kalber, 2009).

There are many personality traits that would make a good animal control officer. A good, even temperament is an important trait (Bandow, 1997),

An ACO is frequently placed in situations where it is easy to lose one’s temper or self-control. When that happens, things may be said or done that would not occur under normal circumstances, and this inevitably weakens the officer’s message and often results in complaints to the agency.

Often it can be difficult and frustrating to remain level-headed and professional despite the sometimes chaotic situation that may be occurring. In many cases, dealing with angry or upset pet owners or residents, it sometimes “takes a lot of self control to choke back hot words” (ibid.). Additional traits “include integrity, moral courage, dignity, smartness, patience, and calmness” (ibid.).

*Human Resource Management.* I discussed the issue of animal control and its impact on individuals with Lisa Scott, Administrative Manager for the Human Resource Division of the

Chesterfield County Police Department. Admittedly, this topic was one that was unfamiliar to her. The most important issue she mentioned was the topic of an individual being fit for duty. If the emotional well-being of an animal control officer created a possible work problem, the human resource division would evaluate that employee's fitness for actual work duty. She stated this would be done on a case by case basis (Scott, 2009). We also discussed these other factors:

- Supervision would need to recognize possible symptoms of emotional problems
- Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) guidelines for the animal control division
- Psychological evaluation for new animal control hires
- The type of emotional coping mechanisms animal control officers have

The role of the human resource division would take on a supportive role in the overall picture of an individual's emotional health as it pertains to animal control.

The topic of benchmarking was suggested by Kristin S. Brown, SPHR. She is the Human Resource Manager for the Human Resource Division of the Chesterfield County Police Department. Some questions she posed were:

- What pre-hire questions do other jurisdictions have?
- How do they assess someone?
- What kind of support is available?

We also discussed the importance of including the emotional topic in a training situation. This would be something important for new animal control hires as well as a topic for in-service training for current animal control professionals (Brown, 2009).

## Survey Research

### *Interviews*

I conducted personal and telephone interviews with individuals in the animal control profession to gain a better insight into the impact this line of work has on people. The interview form I used (see Appendix B) consists of nine questions. The interviews were confidential in nature and the original forms with notes will remain with the author. The notes are available for inspection upon request.

#### *Interview One*

This individual in Virginia has been in the animal control profession for more than three decades. The overall impact this profession has had on him has been the ability to help with animal problems and working with the public. He said, “you can see and learn so many things about how different people are, how they react.” There is also the chance to learn about the different personalities of people. He also said, “I have learned more than just about dogs and cats.” Such things as diseases and injuries were some of the many things learned that he may never have known in a different field.

It bothers him to see people turn in their pets to the animal shelter facility. He feels these owners use the shelter facility as a “dump-off.” There is a sense of sadness when it comes to some of the animals that are brought in. He said, “Sometimes certain dogs or cats will catch your eye and then they have to be euthanized.” He felt it was hard on him knowing the outcome even though the animal did not. He shared with me the times he has “awakened at night just wondering if that was the right choice for that particular animal to be euthanized.” What makes him feel good, though, is the ability to help the animals, such as basic health care.

The discussion of hiding emotional reactions to situations was a somber one. The most noted situation was the euthanasia of animals. There is a mixture of frustration and anger at this entire process. He felt like he had to hide his emotions on the days euthanasia was performed. Having to assist in this depressing process produced unwanted stress. He did mention the sense of happiness, though, for the animals that didn't get euthanized. This positive emotion he felt as if he didn't have to hide.

The direct emotional effect on him was most noted in our discussion of euthanasia. He mentioned the level of frustration with this subject. His question was, "Why do I have to do this?" Yet, there is always a sense of relief when the euthanasia is finished.

He didn't feel that there was an impact on his family; however, he felt that there was with his job. This primarily focused on how he deals with people. He likes to "have things go smoothly and orderly." He feels like he's more frustrated and then less talkative as a result when the day involves euthanasia. There is even more frustration when things don't go well as planned.

We discussed the suggestion for improvement he felt may be necessary. He believed that more training in the animal control field would be beneficial. He also suggested that, when hiring people in animal control, go into more depth about animal experiences. He said also, "look for people that have it in their heart to work with animals and are not just in it for a paycheck."

### *Interview Two*

This individual in Virginia has been in the animal control profession for almost 15 years. She was in a different line of work prior to this job, however, has known the animal control business since childhood.

The overall impact, she believes, has been a positive one despite sometimes having setbacks. She couldn't think of doing anything else and enjoys the opportunity to meet a lot of people. As she put it, she "loves it."

The biggest challenge she faces daily is that she has had to work alone for a long period of time. This has included work at the shelter facility, handling of animal complaints, and the after-hours on-call status. As a result, she essentially is working a complete 24-hour day each day. This aggravates and frustrates her because she feels like she has "no life." It has been a challenge due to the borderline burnout she feels is happening. She told me that, "I'm thankful for my job, but I'd like a day off with no interruptions."

The overall stress of this cycle she is in caused her to seek help from a medical professional. This was done on her own time as she indicated there is no support from her own organization.

She told a story about an injured puppy that she had to deal with recently. It was a depressing situation for her because she was trying her best to help this puppy. Unfortunately it was euthanized. She wanted to cry but couldn't because of having to do her job. She said the job "has hardened me up."

The emotional impact on her is high. She feels as if all she has is the job and "it controls me." She feels hopeless at times and is frustrated as well. She also believes her gender has a challenging effect on her life as an animal control professional. She feels like she has to work harder to prove her worth.

The impact on her family is more subtle. Her family understands what she is trying to accomplish and routinely use humor to try to help everyone cope. Sadly, though, she has had to cancel plans with family members at times because of the job and described one member as

being let down. Even while on vacation with her family, she was contacted by the job numerous times.

The impact on her job appears to be daily. She feels it is quite challenging in what she tries to accomplish each day. She frequently comes in early just to try and catch up. She doesn't like for things to get behind because this will make the next day that much more difficult.

Her main suggestion for improvement is simple—more help! She says it's very difficult and frustrating when there is only one person. She is troubled by the thought of having to work while sick or injured because there is no one else to help. She also feels the need for more training and more resources to do her job more effectively.

### *Interview Three*

This individual in Virginia has been in the animal control profession for nearly five years. He was not in this line of work prior to animal control.

He has thoroughly enjoyed the overall impact of the animal control job. However, he did mention there were lots of hours, stress, and compassion fatigue. The toughest part for him was the euthanasia decision.

His daily emotional challenges included those dealing with euthanasia, animal hoarding situations, and uneducated owners. He was frustrated with what he considers the “stupidity of people.” He felt that there was a lack of concern on the part of the owner. He said, “they can't take care of themselves, let alone their animals.”

There is also an emotional challenge with the court and legal system. There is a sense of aggravation when he feels like he doesn't get anywhere with his animal cases. He also feels as if there are political issues involved.

There isn't anything specific for animal control in terms of help from his organization. There is, however, a coping/debriefing team for the overall locality.

He hides his emotions when he's on a particular incident and then deals with it later. There is a sense of depression and discouragement he must hide when dealing with such situations as an animal hoarding incident. He feels like there are more discouraging situations than the positive ones. An interesting comment he made was about those in this line of work. He said, "With people I know in the animal business I can bring up the good stuff." Outside of that circle, he doesn't really talk about the situations he encounters. He did seem pleased, though, that he can confide in someone outside of his department and work situation. This was someone he said, "I can vent to."

The direct emotional impact this has had on him individually has produced a "why bother at times" mentality. This is both discouraging and depressing at times for him. He does feel that he "tends to dwell on the bad things." However, he also tries to improve and help make changes. Stress from the job does seem to have an effect on his physical health, too. He mentioned problem pertaining to issues with eating and nicotine use.

He said his family tries to be overall supportive. Unfortunately, though, if he's had a bad day at work it does occasionally affect his home life in a negative manner.

His job is affected depending on how things are going in the work-day. If things are going well, he feels more encouraged and tries to be more proactive. If things aren't going well he becomes more reclusive to the office. He feels discouragement on the job and then feels less effective as a result. He then doesn't want to deal with anyone and wants to be out of a situation fast.



As has been mentioned in previous interviews, he also suggested more overall training. He believes he would be more effective with more training and would also gain more respect from his locality. He encouraged more specific training such as dealing with compassion fatigue. He suggested that some type of stress debriefing course be offered at the annual conference held by the Virginia Animal Control Association.

#### *Interview Four*

This individual in Virginia I spoke with has been in the animal control profession for almost 13 years. Prior to joining the animal control profession, she was in the animal medical field.

The biggest impact she feels in the animal control profession is the constant struggle to be recognized as a professional. There is a level of frustration because doing this job is “not a joke.” She constantly feels like she has to help “educate the outside public.” She feels like the impact of animal control is more on her professional life than it is on her personal one.

An emotional challenge she faces frequently is one that deals with pets that are released to her agency by the owner and their family. In many cases the family is devastated as they have to give up their pet. This has a direct emotional impact on her as she may be the last person to see the animal before it is euthanized. There is sense of frustration and aggravation she must cope with as she encounters citizens who are uneducated. She recalled a situation involving an animal that had been trapped in a terrible manner. Despite her efforts to save it, the animal had to be euthanized. This situation troubled and upset her because it could have been handled more humanely had the citizen been better educated. The positive situations, though, are very rewarding and there is a sense of accomplishment she enjoys.

She recalled a time when she sought assistance from a psychologist due to several terrible dreams she had. These dreams combined aspects of work along with things outside of work. Initially she was happy for the help provided but was later disappointed at the lack of follow-up by the psychologist.

Her locality has a mental health services program for overall issues that affect her entire organization, both personal and work related. There is a peer support group; however, animal control doesn't seem to be taken very seriously. She told me she has taken it upon herself to help co-workers in her animal control field despite not having any official policy or procedure.

When we spoke about hiding her emotions she said a resounding, "Of course." She feels like she's an "easy crier" and believes that she has the "biggest, softest heart." She mentioned that it was important to hide emotions when investigating certain cases or interviewing someone for such situations as animal cruelty. She feels that females have more of an edge when it comes to compassion. She said that it was "ok to let some feelings through" when appropriate for the situation. This allows you to look human and to build trust with people. She does occasionally get frustrated with the legal system, yet must hide those emotions.

We talked about the effect the emotional impact has on her. She said she was amazed at some of the things she has done. For her, there is exhilaration with the "great stuff of the job." She mentioned such things as being "out and about in the woods and the sunshine." The negative impact, though, have been the unusual dreams she has that she believes are work related.

Her family is very understanding of the work she does. They empathize with her and as she described it, "feel the emotions through me." She laughed a bit when she also said she can have her family "rolling on the floor" with some of the stories she's told them.

She doesn't believe there is a direct impact on her job duties. However, she does get frustrated with what she described as the "bureaucracy" of things. This includes rules, policies, procedures, political issues, and money for training. She joked about her way of dealing with argumentative situations. As she put it, "I'm not arguing with you, I'm passionately discussing the issue with you."

She had an interesting idea for the animal control profession in Virginia. She suggested a three-tiered approach to animal control. Essentially there would be three levels of animal control officers depending on the needs and expectations of the locality. She realizes the budgetary constraints have made training needs difficult. Having the availability for training would be an important move in the right direction.

#### *Interview Five*

This individual I spoke with has been in the animal control profession for more than 25 years in Virginia. Prior to the animal control profession, she worked in research and with horses.

The biggest impact she feels this profession has had on her has been dealing with the psychology of people. She felt that there is a level of stress having to deal with the ignorance and stubbornness of people pertaining to animal husbandry. She also felt there is stress in dealing with the difference in opinions of the different people she encounters. She used the example of humane organizations and groups that hunt. She felt like she had to be a mediator at times with these two groups of different opinioned people. She also mentioned the stress resulting from euthanasia. Such things as loss of sleep, grief, and depression were mentioned.

On a daily basis, she felt that there is a need for her to practice anger management. This is important because she said that people could be allowed to see any anger she might feel.

Stress management and the issues surrounding euthanasia were daily challenges as well. These daily challenges have caused her to, “wear different hats each day.” She explained this by saying, “I’m a teacher, counselor, caregiver, vet tech, politician, and judge.” At any given time we must take on a different role depending on the circumstances. She felt that the caregiver role was one of most importance. Not only does she help the animals, she helps the people, too.

On two different occasions she has been injured while working and has sought professional help. One incident in particular involved being seriously hurt by a horse. She suffered broken bones as well as shoulder and neck injuries. She was unable to work for almost a year and suffered emotional problems, too. The workers compensation covered the physical injuries, however, did not cover the counseling services she needed from the result of the trauma. She was “worried about my job security” and truly wanted to come back to work. Trying to get better emotionally was humiliating and stressful. She also sought help from her own personal doctor as a result of this situation.

Her organization offers an overall employee assistance type of program for mental health related issues. There is no specific assistance as it pertains to animal control.

She told me her emotions are hidden all the time in her job as an animal control professional. She said, “People can’t feel what we feel.” In essence, regular people are not able to feel what animal control professionals feel. She said she has to hide her anger and frustration while having to be nice. She said she stills has to “smile and be professional” even when “you run out of patience.”

The personal effect of the animal control profession is one of irritability. She also feels that her emotional energy is frequently drained. She said, “it can be grueling having to deal with people each day.” Even dealing with the good, well-meaning people can be challenging.

Her family understands the work she does and is supportive. She said, though, they “have to deal with my moods.” They want to hear about her day but she doesn’t want to talk about it.

The impact of the emotions on her job was described to me as an “emotional rollercoaster.” She said, “Sometimes you don’t want to be here, but where else could you go.” She occasionally asks herself such questions as, “Can I handle it another year? What am I doing here?” She felt like she could never be truly happy unless she’s working with animals. She said, “You stay with it because you know you’re the best at it.”

Her suggestions for improvement are ones that involve educating the public better on animal care. More specifically, she mentioned education for children. Such topics as care of pets, animals in general and rabies information are important. These educational sessions could be held in places such as libraries and schools. She also suggested education for humane societies about animal control professionals. She wanted it understood that animal control officers are “not monsters and not the dreaded dog catcher.”

#### *Interview Six*

This individual in Florida has been with the animal control profession for less than five years. Prior to this profession, she spent her time in veterinary nursing in the private sector as well as in an animal shelter.

The overall impact for her has been one that is a “very consuming position.” She feels that this job can’t always be “left at work” and frequently takes her work home with her. She says she “lives and breathes it.” Even if she was not in the animal control profession, she would still “follow what was going on in the field.” She jokingly referred to what she does as being “an

illness.” She has much respect for the animal control field as well as all the people in it, including shelter and veterinary staff.

She faces anger and frustration on a daily basis with her job. Sometimes, she sadly admits, she feels a level of “hatred toward people because of their ignorance and cruelty to animals.” There is also a sense of frustration and sadness in the animal control field she experiences when she can’t help and her “hands are tied.” This was specifically for situations related to animals where no laws were broken. She feels like, as time goes by, she has less patience. She feels sad when an animal she has brought in is ultimately euthanized. This is even more painful for her when it is an animal she has formed somewhat of a bond with. Also troubling for her are the situations where she sometimes feels conflicted. She mentioned animal cases that she would ask herself, “Is a ticket the best thing to do?” She gets lied to routinely, therefore, doesn’t know always what the best thing might be to do. She sometimes feels defensive with some situations; however, she tries not to react negatively. What is not a daily occurrence is the happiness. She said, “The happy endings are not there often enough.” However, when they do occur, they are “very important.”

The only time she has sought help for her work situations have been work related injuries. These were handled through the workers compensation. Interestingly enough, she has considered contacting a therapist as a result of her job. She has not contacted one as of yet.

According to her, there is nothing related to support for situations as they pertain to animal control in her organization. She mentioned, though, that there is, “just whatever is offered under personal insurance.” She said that the police have access to stress management assistance.

She said she absolutely hides her emotional reactions to situations. She specifically mentioned hiding her disdain and disgust as well as her sometimes hatred toward the public. This, she said, was “only related to animal issues.” She also hides her sadness because she doesn’t like to show it. She mentioned she doesn’t “want to look like a cry-baby.” In some situations, she has to hide her anger toward internal issues. She may feel an animal should be saved but it is ultimately euthanized. She frequently feels frustration with some of the “insignificant issues” of her job. However, she “can’t show it toward the public.” She also has felt impatient toward certain cultures because of repeat offenses by those particular cultures. She feels as if she is “forming stereotypes because of the location where she works.” She admitted she doesn’t like this feeling at all. She said her happy feelings aren’t always hidden except when she’s in “court and I want to clap” because of a good outcome.

The animal control profession has caused her to be less patient and more frustrated with people in general. She said she has “more of a desire to not be around people.” Even when she is off from work she says, “I get more easily frustrated.” Sometimes, she mentions, “my shoulder and neck are killing me” because of the day she had and the driving involved. She feels like the job is physically “taking its toll.” The vehicle she uses is not in good condition and she worries about getting hurt.

Her husband sometimes feels frustration, too. This is often as a result of her venting to him. She often cries when relating her day to him and he hates to see that. However, he is proud of what she does and “loves to tell people what I do.” He and her other family members are supportive.

Depending on the day or week, she sometimes feels less motivated. She dreads some of the follow-ups she has to do with some of her animal cases. She also said, “I sometimes dread

coming to work.” All too often there are more of the bad things and less of the good stuff. She sometimes thinks, “I don’t want to do this anymore.” She said, “no matter how hard I try, you feel like you don’t get through to many people.” However, she still feels a sense of pride in what she does in the animal control profession.

The most important suggestion she recommended for improvement was the need for a better vehicle and equipment. Better equipment would help reduce stress. She also suggested that money should be included in the budget for a stress management class. She felt the stress management class should be mandatory each year and that it should be a class for all animal control agencies. This would “help reduce the stigma” of animal control. She also suggested self-defense classes but realizes this is a budgetary issue. She said the image of animal control has improved; however, there should be more attempts to change public view. She doesn’t like the continued “dog catcher, bad guy image.” She also suggested better education regarding animal related laws. There is often some frustration related to what she can or cannot enforce.

#### *Interview Seven*

This individual in Virginia has been in the animal control profession for almost 20 years. Prior to that, he spent about eight years in the animal research field.

The overall impact the animal control profession has had on him is one that has allowed him to have a “whole new outlook on public service and appreciation for folks in uniform.” There is a “degree of dedication” in the animal control profession coupled with “insurmountable odds with the least amount of resources.”

The emotional and mental challenges he faces each day are ones that help him “adapt and grow with every type of situation.” These include such things as law enforcement, animal issues, human health, and community service. He feels that there is an “expectation to know



everything.” This can be quite challenging. He considers himself an analyzer and gets frustrated sometimes at having to handle all the different aspects of the animal control profession.

He hasn’t sought any assistance with traumatic situations, however, has attended a compassion fatigue course. His organization offers a broad employee assistance program for all employees. He has guided other employees into using this service.

Emotional reactions are hidden all the time. He said his upbringing played a part in all of this because of the mentality that “men don’t display emotions.” Every now and then his emotions boil over. He feels that he doesn’t suppress his emotions as much as he used to early in his career. He rarely displays anger, instead, channeling it toward a disappointment feeling. He said, “I can be down, but try to look toward change.” There is also a feeling of deflation with the legislative system and the sometimes unsuccessful outcomes with the laws. He also mentioned that he helps “others with support of their emotions.” It’s something he is used to and seems natural to him.

The emotional impact has been one that is “very wearing physically and mentally.” It has been “very tough, it’s aged me quickly,” he told me. His physical and mental abilities have been “impaired from the strain.”

The effects have been hard on his family at times. There are some days that his family members “keep away from me until things are ok.” However, his family is generally supportive and understands what he does as a result of his experiences. He said he’s made it a point to explain to his family what he does.

The effect on his job has been in keeping a clear head, having an open perspective and keeping things fair. He also said there is an importance for “renewing and regenerating myself.” Sometimes he says you just have to “back off and pour cold water over your head.”

Throughout his career there have been many roadblocks in his way. He feels that it takes a “special person to handle the good, the bad and the ugly” in the animal control field. He also believes that there “aren’t many jobs that take its toll physically and mentally like this one does.” He said the survival tool in what we do as animal control professionals is “finding peace or get out of this business because it will eat you alive.”

His first suggestion for improvement is that “every ACO [Animal Control Officer] at hire should have a psychological background.” He believes the person conducting that psychological background should have certification and knowledge of animal control. He also believes that much more training is needed. This should include some type of leadership training for animal control supervisors. There also needs to be a better job of education for the public. This is important for improving the image of animal control. He also believes there should be “parallel laws” for animal control professionals that are similar to what protects the interests of law enforcement personnel. More protection for animal control professionals, both personally and legally, would allow for a better sense of security.

#### *Interview Eight*

This individual from the state of Washington has been in the animal control profession for almost 25 years. Prior to that, she was an animal shelter employee responsible for such things as kennel cleaning and animal intake.

The overall impact has been one of enjoyment. She said she loves her profession and that it has provided a great deal of opportunity to grow. She has a college degree and has used that educational background toward helping to make the animal control field more professional. She has been able to use her training and teaching abilities within her animal control field. She believes she is a “good fit” for the animal control job she does.

The main challenge she spoke about was, “Everyday I go to work not knowing what I’ll have to figure out.” Euthanasia and animal suffering are other challenges she faces. She has a respect and love for animals. When faced with sick or injured animals, she says she has to go into “work mode.” She had a sad and unpleasant situation one Thanksgiving Day that involved an abandoned cat. With the animal control comes the people control. Having to deal with the people can sometimes be a much greater challenge. She spoke of the emotional challenge she sometimes faces when helping elderly residents with their older pets. This usually involves the animal being euthanized and the challenges that poses. Equally challenging are the difficult times she faces when informing animal owners that their pet has died. She often finds herself having to handle the emotions of others as well as her own.

She typically talks with family members or co-workers first about situations. She has not sought help except on occasion for work related issues of a non-animal nature. She did, however, have the opportunity to talk with a departmental chaplain who actually contacted her first. Her organization offers an employee assistance program for her locality as well as a chaplain program through the police and fire department.

She said she hides her emotions “all the time.” This is especially true when dealing with euthanasia. She often must hide the tears and sadness when dealing with that aspect of her job. She gets angry at situations when animals are in unsafe conditions. However, she has to remain professional and hide that anger. This is true for disappointment as well. She must stay professional despite the disappointment she may have when dealing with animal owners. Interestingly enough, she also must occasionally hide the happy feelings, too. She might feel the urge to jump up and down for joy when dealing with an animal owner, however, must contain that urge till a later time.

The happy emotions “elate and make my day.” It’s the sad ones that “wear on you, keeping them bottled-up is not good.” She said the angry and happy emotions are “vented later” and are easier to release. The in-between emotions, like sadness, are much more difficult.

She said she can talk to her husband about her job. She is easily able to vent to him the “happy and angry stuff.” She tries not to tell him the sad things despite the fact he can “read me” when she’s had a bad day.

The emotions have impacted her job, too. A recent situation involving other employees was one that was emotionally difficult. She felt as if she had to “wear many hats” that day. She felt like she had to wear a “counselor hat, an actor hat, and a confidentiality hat” with the situation she was in. Despite this and other difficult situations, she tries to look at positive outcomes that can come out of what may have started as a negative situation.

She suggests that more education is needed as it relates to stress management and better coping mechanisms. These can be accomplished through class offerings, workshops, information sessions, and outreach programs. This information of the emotional impact should be available to state associations and agencies. She suggests that we should “get the word out and make it [emotional impact] more visible.” We should “bring it out to the forefront instead of suppressing it.”

The following information was collected from individuals in the animal control profession who did not participate in an actual interview. They did, however, complete the interview forms on their own.

#### *Survey Information One*

This individual in Virginia has been in the animal control profession for more than 20 years. Prior to that, she was involved in animal rehabilitation.

During her career as an animal control professional, the biggest impact has been developing the skills of patience and tolerance. An additional impact has been “understanding my own lack of appreciation for the emotions of animals.”

On a daily basis, there is stress from confrontation and conducting complex investigations. There is also a “desire for a successful conclusion.”

She has sought help for situations experienced in the animal control profession “because of the environment of working in a police department and constant disregard for serious problems in-house.” There is no help offered by her organization as it pertains to animal control. She has hidden her emotional reactions to situations. These include “shock from a violent act to an animal” and “fear from an aggressive and violent person.”

The emotional impact on her specifically has been “lack of sleep, anxiety, heart palpitations.” There isn’t stress on the family because “I learned to leave it at work as best as I can.” The emotional impact doesn’t affect her job.

Her suggestion for improvement is as follows:

The only way the animal control profession can be improved is through unity of peers and a strong desire to pursue goals such as uniform adequate statewide training and strong legislative efforts to validate animal control officers need for training and protection. To accomplish this there must be adequate private funding of organizations such as the Virginia Animal Control Association who could use that funding for training and lobbying.

#### *Survey Information Two*

This individual from California has been in the animal control profession for more than 10 years. She was not in the animal control field prior to that.

She wrote, “On most days it is very rewarding. However, the stress level is intensive. With this job you don’t or can’t leave it at the end of your shift.”

On a daily basis she faces such emotions as anger and disgust with owners who “are rude to us, make unnecessary comments, cuss, and suggest that we enjoy killing dogs.”

She has sought help through a police chaplain for compassion fatigue. She has also sought help from a doctor for her “stomach issues and high blood pressure which I believe are stress related.” Her organization does offer counseling support.

She does hide her emotional reactions to situations. She wrote that she hides her “anger and disgust to people that neglect their animals.” Interestingly, she has “amazement towards some truly “stupid” people that don’t understand or choose to do the right thing for their pet.”

Some of the effects the emotions have had on her include “nightmares-animal related,” tension headaches, and stomach and blood pressure problems. This is a result of the stress.

There is also an impact on her family. She wrote, “Sometimes I have issues of forgetting that I am not at work and take things home or talk about work too much.” Most of her family is supportive of what she does. Her husband, though, doesn’t like to hear about her job due to previous poor circumstances when he was in the animal control profession.

For her, there is sometimes a loss of work because of stress related illness. This is limited because “most of the time I work through it.”

She has some suggestions for improvements. This includes a “more positive image for ACO [Animal Control Officers] in media, workplace, and society.” She also suggests that there should be offered “benefits to ACO [Animal Control Officers] similar to P.D. [Police Departments] as far as stress related job injuries while on duty.”

This research section has provided significant information into the world of animal control professionals. The dog catcher of yesteryear can no longer work for the animal control world today. Animal control professionals are human and experience a level of emotions that many individuals might not ever understand. Such emotions as anger, frustration, and sadness are frequently hidden by animal control professionals. As a result, these hidden feelings can take a toll on the health and well-being of individuals in this field. The physical and mental demands on animal control professionals are ones that should be recognized by more than just those that do this line of work. From this research, I hope to offer some suggestions for improvement in the application section.

## Application

### *Steps to Implement the Change*

*Step One.* This step should involve the recognition that animal control professionals experience emotions and mental challenges on a daily basis. The recognition is already there, in most cases, by the individual animal control professional. In some cases, though, the emotions are repressed and hidden too deeply. I believe this may be detrimental to the individual and subsequently the organization. In my opinion, it is important for leaders to recognize potential issues related to the emotional impact of animal control before serious situations actually occur. For leaders to recognize the potential for problems as a result of the emotional impact, they must first recognize the importance of the animal control professional within their organization.

One such method of recognition is the National Animal Control Appreciation Week, held the second full week of April. This event was created by Kevin Kilgore, Chief of Animal Control for Hanover County, Virginia. The week offers a chance to provide recognition to men and women in the animal control profession.

Within my organization, I plan to share this research with my supervisor as well as the appropriate chain of command with the Chesterfield County Police Department. This includes the Major of the Operational Support Bureau, the Deputy Chief for Support, and the Chief of Police.

I hope to share this information on a regional and national level as well. This will include such organizations as the Virginia Animal Control Association and the National Animal Control Association.



*Step Two.* I hope to have a training session during the Chesterfield Animal Control Officers in-service training scheduled for fall 2009. I hope to schedule this session for a two-hour block of instruction that will include discussion of the emotional/mental related issues of the animal control profession. Additional topics I hope to include will be stress management and coping with compassion fatigue in the animal control profession. I would like to coordinate this training with a mental health specialist. I hope to have this training on a routine basis, such as every two years in the in-service training sessions (see Appendix C and D).

Each year, the Virginia Animal Control Association and National Animal Control Association holds a conference where animal control professionals gather for training. In past conferences, dealing with compassion fatigue and stress management training had been offered. I hope to encourage the association to include this type of training more regularly and solicit more input from the members of the association.

#### *Projected Cost of Change*

I believe the need for training and instruction outweighs the costs associated with the actual training. I hope the tentatively planned two-hour training class scheduled for the fall of 2009 will prove beneficial for Chesterfield County. The total costs for this training will be approximately \$650. This figure includes the following for the two-hour session:

- Salary (including benefits) of supervisor and assistant supervisor of animal control
- Salary (including benefits) of seven animal control officers
- Fees associated with the mental health specialist
- Planning costs

### *Projected Benefits*

The projected benefits of recognizing the emotional impact of the animal control profession are measurable and immeasurable.

*Measurable.* Recognizing, understanding, and addressing the emotional impact on animal control professionals would help increase the likely retention of qualified individuals. Emotional and physical burnouts are contributing factors to the loss of qualified employees. Costs related to training new hires would be reduced as a result of the retention of current employees. For example, in Chesterfield County:

- Current starting yearly salary with benefits of a new animal control officer is \$43,200
- It takes approximately six months to fully train an animal control officer
- Approximate training costs for six months = \$96,100

This includes the salaries and benefits of the new officer, the training officer, vehicle and equipment costs, as well as the cost of attending a state mandated basic animal control school

These savings could be used toward such things as additional or advanced training for current employees and new equipment.

Better emotional health increases the likelihood of better physical health. As a result, I believe this would reduce the risk of work related injuries if an individual is in better emotional and physical health. Workers compensation claims and the use of sick leave might also be reduced.

*Immeasurable.* The internal well-being of an animal control professional might be difficult to quantify yet would be valuable. I believe the improved emotional health of an animal control professional would lead to greater job satisfaction, increased self-worth, and a more

positive outlook. This is beneficial to an organization, such as Chesterfield County, as it may increase job productivity and retention.

*Suggested Follow-Up Action*

As a leader, I hope to assess the changes and improvements through observation, employee development programs, and conversations with animal control personnel. I believe, continued training related to stress management and the emotional impact are necessary for the overall success of my animal control organization. I hope to incorporate this type of training at the minimum of every two years.

## Conclusion

### *Summary*

In the introduction to this research paper I presented my topic of the emotional impact of the animal control profession on individuals that are in this particular field. It is not too often that the topics of different feelings are discussed in the animal control profession. Yet, the emotional and mental impact has a significant impact on how individuals handle their personal and professional lives. I have a personal attachment to this topic because I have been in the animal control profession for more than 17 years. As a result, I have experienced emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration in the course of handling my job.

The research section provided interview information from local members of the Chesterfield County government. This included an assistant commonwealth attorney, a mental health specialist, and members from the human resource management section of the police department. I also conducted many interviews and gathered important details and information from other animal control professionals. Most information was gathered from interviews of animal control professionals in Virginia. However, there were a few participants from other states. The ideas and thoughts provided were both educational and insightful.

The application section was a means to take the research I've gathered and provide a useful outlet for it. Training for animal control professionals is important and necessary to sustain the quality of work that continues to be expected. This training also must include the opportunities for animal control professionals to help them cope with the stresses and difficulties of their chosen field of work.

My overall findings of this project are both positive and negative. There are very real people in the animal control profession experiencing very real emotions as they go about their

job duties each day. There is a positive sense of accomplishment among all of them. Sadly, though, there isn't always the recognition that is deserved. Such negative issues as animal cruelty and animal hoarding remain constant challenges to those of us in this line of work. The animal control profession, though, has and will continue to improve because of the determination and quality of people that have such a positive impact on the animal world.

### *Personal Learning*

I knew going into this project that it wasn't going to be easy. I knew the challenge of collecting the information was going to be both time consuming and difficult. I had to handle the challenges of my everyday personal and professional life and still work on this project. It was difficult on an emotional level when I gathered this research. Reading the articles and talking with the individuals I interviewed provoked my own personal feelings. This was difficult as I had to maintain a professional dedication to this project yet still incorporate my own ideas and thoughts. Despite all of that, the rewards of completing this project have been incredible. I have a further respect and admiration for the animal control profession.

I've learned that there are many more animal control professionals that think in a similar manner as I do, yet have their own methods and experiences. In some cases, they think far more intuitively and deeper than I would have ever guessed. These individuals that I had the honor of talking with provided an inside look into the world of animal control professionals. These very real people gave me very real thoughts and emotional descriptions of how they lead their lives personally and professionally.

The business of animal control is my chosen profession as it is for many others. The quality and level will increase as those of us in this profession strive harder for improvement in the care and welfare of both animals and people alike.

## APPENDIX A

§ 3.2-6570. (Effective October 1, 2008) Cruelty to animals; penalty.

A. Any person who: (i) overrides, overdrives, overloads, tortures, ill-treats, abandons, willfully inflicts inhumane injury or pain not connected with bona fide scientific or medical experimentation, or cruelly or unnecessarily beats, maims, mutilates, or kills any animal, whether belonging to himself or another; (ii) deprives any animal of necessary food, drink, shelter or emergency veterinary treatment; (iii) sores any equine for any purpose or administers drugs or medications to alter or mask such sores for the purpose of sale, show, or exhibition of any kind, unless such administration of drugs or medications is within the context of a veterinary client-patient relationship and solely for therapeutic purposes; (iv) willfully sets on foot, instigates, engages in, or in any way furthers any act of cruelty to any animal; (v) carries or causes to be carried by any vehicle, vessel or otherwise any animal in a cruel, brutal, or inhumane manner, so as to produce torture or unnecessary suffering; or (vi) causes any of the above things, or being the owner of such animal permits such acts to be done by another is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

In addition to the penalties provided in this subsection, the court may, in its discretion, require any person convicted of a violation of this subsection to attend an anger management or other appropriate treatment program or obtain psychiatric or psychological counseling. The court may impose the costs of such a program or counseling upon the person convicted.

B. Any person who: (i) tortures, willfully inflicts inhumane injury or pain not connected with bona fide scientific or medical experimentation, or cruelly and unnecessarily beats, maims, mutilates or kills any animal whether belonging to himself or another; (ii) sores any equine for any purpose or administers drugs or medications to alter or mask such sores for the purpose of sale, show, or exhibit of any kind, unless such administration of drugs or medications is under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian and solely for therapeutic purposes; (iii) maliciously deprives any companion animal of necessary food, drink, shelter or emergency veterinary treatment; (iv) instigates, engages in, or in any way furthers any act of cruelty to any animal set forth in clauses (i) through (iv); or (v) causes any of the actions described in clauses (i) through (iv), or being the owner of such animal permits such acts to be done by another; and has been within five years convicted of a violation of this subsection or subsection A, is guilty of a Class 6 felony if the current violation or any previous violation of this subsection or subsection A resulted in the death of an animal or the euthanasia of an animal based on the recommendation of a licensed veterinarian upon determination that such euthanasia was necessary due to the condition of the animal, and such condition was a direct result of a violation of this subsection or subsection A.

C. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the dehorning of cattle conducted in a reasonable and customary manner.

D. This section shall not prohibit authorized wildlife management activities or hunting, fishing or trapping as regulated under other titles of the Code of Virginia, including Title 29.1, or to

farming activities as provided under this title or regulations adopted hereunder.

E. It is unlawful for any person to kill a domestic dog or cat for the purpose of obtaining the hide, fur or pelt of the dog or cat. A violation of this subsection is a Class 1 misdemeanor. A second or subsequent violation of this subsection is a Class 6 felony.

F. Any person who: (i) tortures, willfully inflicts inhumane injury or pain not connected with bona fide scientific or medical experimentation or cruelly and unnecessarily beats, maims or mutilates any dog or cat that is a companion animal whether belonging to him or another; and (ii) as a direct result causes the death of such dog or cat that is a companion animal, or the euthanasia of such animal on the recommendation of a licensed veterinarian upon determination that such euthanasia was necessary due to the condition of the animal, is guilty of a Class 6 felony. If a dog or cat is attacked on its owner's property by a dog so as to cause injury or death, the owner of the injured dog or cat may use all reasonable and necessary force against the dog at the time of the attack to protect his dog or cat. Such owner may be presumed to have taken necessary and appropriate action to defend his dog or cat and shall therefore be presumed not to have violated this subsection. The provisions of this subsection shall not overrule § 3.2-6540 or 3.2-6552.

G. Any person convicted of violating this section may be prohibited by the court from possession or ownership of companion animals.

## APPENDIX B

### ANIMAL CONTROL PROFESSION INTERVIEW FORM

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Introduction:**

- Interviewer: Robert C. Leinberger, Jr.
- Assistant Supervisor-Chesterfield County Animal Control
- Animal Control Profession since December 1991

#### **Interview Details:**

- Purpose is to obtain information about emotional/mental impact of the animal control profession
- Interview will remain confidential
- Interview will last approximately 15-30 minutes
- Notes are necessary to maintain accuracy
- Consent form
- Questions/concerns about the interview

#### **Opening Statement:**

Thanks for agreeing to take part in this important information session. As I mentioned previously, this discussion will be to get your thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the impact of the animal control profession. I will be conducting interviews with other animal control professionals to obtain as much information as individuals are willing to provide. This interview is confidential and names will not be used. This interview should only take 15-30 minutes of your time. With your permission, I'd like to take notes so that I can maintain detail and accuracy. Would you mind taking a moment to read and then sign this consent form? *NOTE: If the interview is conducted by phone the alternate statement will be:* I need to fax (or send as an attached document to an email) you a permission form, have you read it, sign it, and then fax it back to me before I can continue with the questions. Before we get started, what questions do you have?

#### **Questions:**

1. How long have you worked in the animal control profession?



2. Were you in an animal related field prior to your current job as an animal control professional? If so, what type of job?
3. What impact does the animal control profession have on you?
4. What emotional/mental challenges do you face on a daily basis?
5. Have you sought any help for traumatic situations you have experienced while in the animal control profession? If so, what type(s)?
6. Does your organization offer any support/help for crisis situations that involve the animal control profession? If so, what type(s)?
7. Have you ever hidden your emotional reactions to situations? If so, describe when?
8. What effect does the emotional impact have on:  
you:  
your family:  
your job:
9. What suggestions do you have for improvements?

Summary:

Conclusion:

- Thank you for participating in this important interview. What questions do you have?

## APPENDIX C

### ANIMAL CONTROL TRAINING EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF ANIMAL CONTROL INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

#### **TOPIC AND TRAINING OVERVIEW**

The training topic is the emotional impact of the animal control profession. The Chesterfield County Police Department Animal Control Division provides basic field training on a regular basis to new animal control officer recruits. There is a minimum level of training that is mandated by the State of Virginia. This includes such training related to laws and animal welfare. Optional training sometimes includes the discussion of stress management and compassion fatigue. This training is very basic and may not be included in all training programs. It does not include training for individuals already in the animal control profession. A typical class may consist of 10 individuals or less, primarily Chesterfield County Animal Control personnel. Other jurisdictions may be included as necessary. I am allotted two hours of training time for the animal control emotional impact topic.

#### **MODULE OVERVIEW**

This detailed and interactive training plan will provide a more in-depth level of instruction related to the emotional impact of the animal control profession. Participants should be engaged with lecture, stories, individual and group exercises, and a feedback session. This training should be coordinated and include a mental health specialist. The training session should include thorough information related to the following topics:

- History of the animal control profession

- Compassion fatigue related to such topics as:  
Animal neglect/cruelty issues, laws, internal/external factors
- Coping mechanisms
- Stress Management
- Recognition of the importance of animal control professionals

Specific animal and job related issues should be discussed to help the animal control officers with recognition of potential problems, compassion fatigue, methods of coping and stress management. After completion of this training session, animal control officers will have a better understanding of the emotional impact of the animal control profession. As such, they can apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities they learn to be more effective in animal control and their own lives.

### **TIPS FOR TRAINERS**

Trainers should be aware that most of the animal control officers will be from Chesterfield; however, there may be other individuals from different jurisdictions. Therefore, it may be necessary to find out several days prior to the training what other agencies are represented. This is important due to the possibility of differing local ordinances and policies as they pertain to animal control issues.

The trainer should arrive ahead of the scheduled training session to prepare for the presentation to start on time. A prompt start to the animal control training session will help the overall training for the individuals.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- Training Population

A typical class may consist of 10 individuals. The individuals in the training session may

include varying ages and length of services in the animal control profession. They are primarily Chesterfield County Animal Control Officers, but may occasionally include other jurisdictions.

- Room Set Up

The room should be set up in a u-shaped design for maximum effectiveness.

- Equipment

If at all possible, the room should be equipped with a computer, DVD/VHS player, whiteboard, and an adjustable screen for viewing.

## **TRAINING OBJECTIVES**

By the completion of this program, participants will be able to:

- Discuss the history of animal control and the importance of the profession
- Recognize symptoms of compassion fatigue in animal control.
- Recognize ways to cope with the emotional issues of animal control
- Utilize methods of stress management.

### **Opening video**

- Dog bite in a public park in Los Angeles

### **Introduction**

- 17 years with Chesterfield County Animal Control
- Assistant Supervisor for Chesterfield Animal Control
- Animal Control is important to the community

### **Training Objectives**

- Review the training objectives with the animal control officers
- Ask what questions the participants may have

## **Most Memorable Animal Experience**

- Albino Monocle Cobra case story
- Fun activity involving a good or bad animal experience
- Group participation and discussion

## **Enforcement Authority**

- Animal Control Officers are professionals
- Enforce animal control laws
- Involvement and challenges with the legal system

## **Community Involvement**

- Community may be quick to criticize
- Animal Control Officers handle the majority of the animal related violations
- High level of emotions frequently involved

## **Public Safety**

- Discuss the importance of public safety and personal safety

## **Emotional Issues**

- Attempting to do too much with too little time or resources
- Animal cruelty situations
- Animal hoarding
- Emotional and physical burnout
- Compassion fatigue

## **BREAK FOR 10 MINUTES**

### **Activity**

- Explain the short activity about  
“If you could be bitten by one animal...” What would it be and why?
- Encourage the animal control officers to write legibly and to be creative

## **Coping Mechanisms**

- Discussion of methods that have worked or have not worked
- Quality training in the workplace

## **Stress Management**

- Mental health specialist to provide information
- Relaxation techniques
- Counseling
- Employee Assistance Program

## **Wrap it up**

- Recap of the topics discussed:
  - Enforcement Authority
  - Community Involvement
  - Public Safety
  - Emotional Issues
  - Coping Mechanisms
  - Stress Management

## **Conclusion**

- Distribute evaluations
- Thank animal control officers for their participation

## **EVALUATION METHODS**

Informal evaluation will be conducted throughout the entire training session. This will be done by observing the behavior of the animal control officers. The written evaluation of the Animal Control Training class will be done by a three question training feedback form. It will ask the participants the following:

- What did you find *most* useful in the animal control training program?
- What did you find *least* useful in the animal control training program?
- Is there anything in the animal control training program that could be improved?

There is also room on the feedback form for additional comments. The information obtained from the feedback form can be used for improvements and adjustments to any future training sessions.

APPENDIX D

**Chesterfield County Animal Control  
Training Feedback**

1. What did you find *most* useful in the animal control training program?

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2. What did you find *least* useful in the animal control training program?

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3. Is there anything in the animal control training program that could be improved?

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4. Additional Comments

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## **The Pledge**

*On my honor I hereby affirm that this work was created by me, the writings and conclusions are entirely my own and all ideas from others are properly cited and referenced. In addition, this work is original for this class and none of it had already been written for another class nor have I received credit for this in any other class.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Robert C. Leinberger, Jr.