

CWA Presentation

Karen Johnson

I have been intensely involved in cats for the last 25 years, first as a showing breeder of Persian and Himalayan cats, second as a business owner manufacturing toys for cats and cat related gift items for humans, third, research and demographic studies in conjunction with National Pet Alliance and Cat Fanciers Association on cats and dogs. Lastly, I started rescue efforts on several large feral cat colonies. You can say I have dedicated my life to cats!

Over the last 14 years I have served on numerous task forces in the San Jose area, and I am currently appointed as Chair of the Santa Clara County Animal Advisory Commission, and am a founding member of the Santa Clara County Cat Coalition. All of the task forces were focused on defining the problem of what is causing too many animals to be entering the shelter, and then devising solutions to solve that problem. I have a motto that goes "One cannot solve a problem until it is first defined" and this is what I do. Define cat and dog problems, and work on solutions.

The current Cat Coalition project is a group which includes all 6 Santa Clara County shelters, and all major cat rescue organizations in the county. We are declaring 2006, "The Year of the Feral Cat," and are working toward a goal to raise public awareness that if they are feeding stray cats, to get them fixed, and then providing the resource materials for getting it done.

It was shown in my report from 1995-2000 that every \$1 spent on S/N, particularly of ferals, that \$5 in animal control costs were saved. It costs \$153 to put a cat in the shelter, as oppose to \$45 to alter it. We expect to see shelter intakes decline within 2 years.

We have gone so far as to analyze the zip code data for cats entering the shelter for the last 3 years, plotting the addresses of where the shelter cats are coming from, then targeting those neighborhoods for intensive trapping, neighborhood meetings and vouchers.

Through two major 1000 household studies in California, plus numerous smaller shelter studies, we have been able to cut through the rhetoric and get to the facts of where the cats and dogs entering the shelters are coming from, and why they are ending up at the shelter. We look at live release rates from shelters, and determine what can raise those rates. I am currently working on a third 1000 household study to determine what changes occurred in the animal population in Santa Clara county after 10 years of cat spay/neuter voucher programs. The study is due to be published next year, and the results are very interesting.

Nothing irritates me more than reading bad statistics in the media. In particular, there is a large well-known animal organization who has a chart showing that 2 cats can produce a couple hundred thousand, or so, offspring over 12 years. I sat down and figured it out

one time. If every cat has 8 female kittens, and they have 3 litters a year, and no one ever, ever dies, or gets fixed, then it could be possible. However, statistically it is 2.1 litters per year of 4.25 kittens, 50/50 male and female, of which 42% will be dead by the age of 2 months. In general, 1/3 of kittens die under the best of conditions. It is worse outdoors. Using actual scientific data, including mortality, this works out to roughly 3200 offspring over 7 years, IF no one is ever fixed.

When you write about a proposed ordinance, please deal in FACTS, not rhetoric to substantiate what is going on. What is the underlying problem which the law is attempting to solve. Are shelter statistics going up or down in certain categories? Is there actual statistical data to support the position? Who is behind it? Who are opposed and why? Have local shelters implemented programs to reduce shelter intakes and euthanasia, for instance, fostering unweaned kittens, trap/neuter/return of ferals, etc.?

In Santa Clara County, 50% of euthanasias are feral cats and their unweaned kittens. Nothing will change that until ferals are trapped and fixed. Another 25% are sick and injured, and may also be feral, as only the primary presenting factor is recorded as the reason for euthanasia.

Check your data. Strive for accurate statistics. Find out who is behind proposals, and please, start writing, "If you are feeding a stray cat, get it fixed!"