

**Sunday Column – What is No-Kill?
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We've come a long way over the past 150 years when it comes to animal welfare in the U.S. The original function of animal control was to limit the spread of rabies. This has, for all intents and purposes, been accomplished. The incidence of rabies in humans is extremely rare. Even so, too many animal control agencies have not changed their operational models in response to the current reality.

It is only the most progressive cities in which government officials give any thought to live release rates or see this as an indicator of success in their animal control agencies. In fact, there are still animal control shelters that do not operate adoption programs at all. They simply pick up stray animals and euthanize them once the legal stray hold expires.

For those cities approaching the pinnacle of Maslow's Hierarchy the ultimate goal, when it comes to animal welfare, is to achieve "no-kill" status. With all the in-fighting among animal welfare organizations this can become a controversial topic. There is a long history of conflicting ideas regarding the definition of "no-kill". For some it is as simple as a percentage threshold related to live release vs. euthanasia rates, most commonly stated as 90% vs. 10%

This no longer quite does it for me as I've seen large discrepancies in the way various agencies calculate their live release rates. A high live release rate is a demonstration of success that will bring in more contributions. So, they may be tempted to fudge the numbers a little bit.

In 2004, a group of national animal welfare organizations met to develop uniform definitions and a standard calculation to determine live release rate. What came out of this meeting was a set of written guidelines called the Asilomar Accords. Although this information is readily available on line it is surprising underutilized as the standard for our industry.

Even with the Asilomar Accords there is no magic threshold for live release rate that automatically means a community has achieved "no-kill" status. This is because a rate does not, by itself reveal whether or not any healthy or treatable animal has been euthanized.

In Muscogee and Harris Counties in Georgia we're now at a 92% live release rate and that is thrilling. Yet too many animals continue to die in our animal control facilities. Shelter euthanasia continues as the leading cause of death in companion animals nation-wide. That is a terrible statement for a civilized, first world country to make but it is a fact. I, for one, know we can do better than this.

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