



<b>Policy and Procedure</b>		Euthanasia Decision Making Process for Dogs with Demonstrated Behavior Challenges
<b>Effective Date</b>		Date Signed
<b>Reference No.</b>		ASO BHT – 803
<b>Approval</b>	<b>Date</b>	10/15/2022
	<b>Name</b>	Don Bland
	<b>Title</b>	Chief Animal Services Officer
	<b>Signature</b>	<i>Don Bland</i>

### 803.1 Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) defines standards and processes to be used by Animal Services Office (ASO) staff for the purposes of ensuring a case management approach for determining appropriate outcome pathways for a dog with a demonstrated history of aggression. Although future behavior of animals cannot be guaranteed, staff will make every effort to determine risks and the potential safety factors.

### 803.2 Policy

The Assails committed to applying a case management approach to determine viable outcomes for dogs with demonstrated aggression. Discussions around these-at-risk dogs will focus on the following: advocating for the dog’s right to live, as well as its quality of life and advocating for community safety by attempting to determine whether the dog poses a risk to people or animals (and how significantly). Factors influencing this decision may include, but are not limited to, bite history, bite circumstances, history of harm to humans and/or animals, demonstrated aggressive acts, potential management needs, frequency of behavior, etc. Notification of euthanasia will comply with [City Ordinance 20191017-025](#).

### 803.3 Policy Cross-Reference

ASO 501 – Euthanasia of Animals Procedure  
Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 829, Animal Control Officer Training

### 803.4 Acronyms & Definitions

AAC – Austin Animal Center

APA! – Austin Pets Alive!

ASO – Animal Services Office

**At-risk** – Refers to a dog whose behavior or demonstrated actions has raised it to the level of being evaluated by the Enrichment Team and/or Leadership Team for the purposes of determining appropriate outcome options. This also could be a dog for which a safe, viable live outcome cannot/has not been identified due to behavior challenges. This dog is considered at-risk of euthanasia.

**At-Risk Meeting** – A meeting with Enrichment Team Supervisor and Leadership Team to discuss dogs whose placement options have been exhausted and/or need case management due to behavior, to identify outcome pathways and/or action plans to be taken immediately.

**Behavior consult**– Conversations between staff members and potential adopters or fosters for dogs that require specific homes and/or handler skills. The Adoption Team will complete consults for lower-level challenges (like mild separation anxiety, barrier reactivity, etc.) when and if they feel comfortable to do

so. The consult will provide the interested party with the dog's full history, including bites, incidents, behavior challenges, and ways to manage the dog. The consult also helps determine if the potential adopter/foster has the right environment, resources, and/or skill necessary to safely manage the dog. More than one interaction with the potential foster/adopter may be required. If a volunteer gives a consult, staff must provide a final consult. Staff must be the initial and main point of contact. And are the ones who determine if there is a concern with the process moving forward.

**Behavior foster** – A foster that has received training and/or is willing to work extensively with the ASO Operations Manager to maintain a management plan, and/or has demonstrated they have experience and skill to handle higher level dog behaviors.

**Enrichment Team** – ASO staff members who provide enrichment activities for animals at AAC, along with behavioral support by performing behavioral evaluations, placing dogs with behavior challenges in homes or rescues, and making recommendations for placement options for at-risk dogs. Team members have a background in dog behavior or experience, skills, or certifications in dog behavior.

**Behavioral euthanasia** – Humanely ending an animal's life for behavior that leads to the inability of the animal being safely placed in a home/rescue due to serious concern to community safety and/or quality of life concerns for the animal that stem from behavior.

**Leadership Team** – For the purpose of this SOP, it refers to a partial group of the overall ASO Leadership Team that participates in At-Risk Meetings. This group typically includes the Director, Deputy Chief, Program Managers, Head Veterinarian, and Human Resources Coordinator. In conjunction with the Enrichment Team Supervisor, and the Behavior Foster Coordinator, they will make decisions for pathways for dogs that are at-risk of euthanasia. based off their expertise and the expertise of others involved in the management of the animal that is at-risk of euthanasia.

**Serious Bodily Injury (SBI)** – Defined by Texas Penal Code as “bodily injury that creates a substantial risk of death or that causes death, serious permanent disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ.”

**Severe injury** – As referenced in City of Austin ordinance 20191017-025, “any physical injury from a dog bite that results in broken bones, permanently disfiguring lacerations requiring multiple sutures or cosmetic surgery, other surgery or nerve damage.”

**Unprovoked biting** – As referenced in City of Austin ordinance 20191017-025, “biting that is not provoked. Biting is provoked if, among other things, it occurs because the dog was being taunted, or the dog was acting in defense of self, a person, another animal, or property, or the dog was acting from maternal instinct, or the dog was reacting to hunger, pain, or fear, or the dog bites accidentally, as when playing.” Normal dog handling, such as putting on a leash or harness, is not considered provoked.

### **803.5 Procedures**

The following procedures have been established to ensure the smooth operation and efficacy of determining whether euthanasia is the option for a dog with behavior concerns and if there are alternative, live outcome options.

### **803.6 Transparency**

1. Austin Animal Center is committed to transparency.
  - All potential adopters, fosters, and partners will be given complete and thorough information about the behavior and history of an animal prior to pulling it into their program or taking it home.
  - Notifications that a dog is at-risk will be as clear and complete as possible and include a dog's bite or incident history and other behavior concerns, excluding any information that is protected under HIPAA or other laws.
  - Information is subject to Public Information Requests (PIRs).

- A dog may be euthanized without notification if they meet the specific criteria listed in Ordinance 20191017-025, stating that a dog has inflicted severe bodily injury, or it has inflicted a severe bite that is considered unprovoked.

### **803.7 Evaluation/Information Gathering**

1. All dogs considered at-risk of euthanasia will receive the following evaluation/review by members of the Enrichment Team, if applicable/available:
  - Review of owner surrender and/or in-home notes and observations
  - Review of bites and circumstances surrounding the bites
  - Review of observations from staff at intake, during vaccinations, and any other interactions
  - Review of human/animal interaction forms
  - Review of staff/volunteer/foster observations and interactions
2. All dogs considered at-risk of euthanasia will receive the following evaluation/review:
  - Medical evaluation, (if signs or symptoms of medical issues or pain are noted and if these conditions are safe and reasonable to evaluate)
  - Any legal notes – dangerous, vicious, SBI investigations
  - A plea made to all rescue and high-risk rescue partners.
3. Some dogs also MAY receive the following evaluations/review, depending on the individual dog, its behavior, and its circumstances:
  - Playgroup evaluation, if safe to do so
  - Foster evaluation
  - Cage-side evaluations by Enrichment Team
  - Hands on evaluation by Enrichment Team
  - Specialty consultation/evaluation – i.e., Veterinary Behaviorist, professional/external dog trainer, detection dog, or another working dog group

### **803.8 Roles and Responsibilities**

1. All staff members and volunteers are required to bring any dogs described below to the attention of the Enrichment Team, Enrichment Team Supervisor, and the ASO Operations Manager:
  - Has a moderate, unprovoked bite.
  - Has a severe bite.
  - They believe the dog may pose a risk to the public
  - Has concerning notes that could make them at-risk or long stay dogs.
  - The dog's well-being is at-risk due to behavioral issues/challenges
  - They believe a dog needs additional behavioral resources for their proper management and/or the safety of humans.
2. Pet Resource Center Staff and Animal Protection
  - Identify dogs that have concerning behaviors and notes that make them at-risk by utilizing the [rubric approved by Leadership]
  - Once these dogs are identified, their Animal ID (AID), interaction forms, and rubric must be provided to the Enrichment Team, Enrichment Team Supervisor, and the ASO Operations Manager.
3. Leadership Team will identify dogs that might be at-risk and provide their AID to the ASO Operations Manager
4. Enrichment Specialists
  - Identify dogs that have concerning behaviors and histories that make them at-risk when they are evaluating dogs (whether in person or by notes) and by using the [rubric approved by Leadership]

- Once these dogs are identified, their AID, interaction forms, and rubric must be provided to the Enrichment Team Supervisor and ASO Operations Manager
  - If the dog has not previously been handled outside of their kennel or is coming out of quarantine and has a moderate, unprovoked, or severe bite, Enrichment Specialists will consult with the ASO Operations Manager before handling the dog.
  - The Enrichment Specialists, along with those at the At-Risks Meetings, are expected to work on outcomes actively always for these animals – these efforts and/or ideas should be shared with the Enrichment Team Supervisor and ASO Operations Manager
5. Enrichment Team Supervisor
- Ensure documentation of dogs being discussed is accurate and any follow-up is completed by the determined deadline.
  - Gather input and recommendations from individual Enrichment Team members to present at the At-Risk Meetings with the Leadership Team.
  - Follow-up with additional staff and any volunteers necessary to gather all pertinent information.
  - Ensure At-Risk Meeting notes are prepared and sent to the Leadership Team and Behavior Foster Coordinator no later than the day prior or the morning of the At-Risk Meeting
  - Must actively work on pathways for outcomes of dogs, present those efforts to the ASO Operations Manager and input that information into the ASO database.
  - At-Risk Meeting notes, with action items clearly notated, resent to the Leadership Team, Behavior Foster Coordinator, Enrichment Team, and Rescue Coordinators by the Enrichment Team Supervisor, or their designee, no later than close of business the following day.
6. Leadership Team
- Discuss each dog presented at the At-Risk Meetings and decide the next steps for the dog being discussed. Areas that will be considered in the decision-making process will include, but are not limited to:
    - Bite history
    - Severity of bite(s)
    - Location of bite(s)
    - Circumstances of the incident(s)
    - Interactions with humans and other animals
    - Legal designation of the animal, if applicable
    - Risk to public safety
    - Ability to manage behavior and well-being (regarding behavior challenges) in shelter setting

### **803.9 Meetings and Process**

#### **1. At-Risk Meetings**

- The Leadership Team, Enrichment Team Supervisor, and Behavior Foster Coordinator meet regularly to discuss dogs who may be considered at-risk
- Reasons a dog may be at-risk may include, but are not limited to:
  - Legal Designation (Dangerous, Vicious, etc.)
  - History of concerning bites or harm to humans
  - History of concerning bites or harm to other animals
  - History of other concerning and/or unpredictable behaviors

- A safe, viable live outcome for the dog and community cannot/has not been identified due to behavior challenges
  - The Enrichment Team will provide recommendations for pathways for dogs brought to discussion for the Leadership Team to consider.
  - The Leadership Team will provide decisions on potential pathways for dogs based on the Enrichment Team's input while still considering public safety, laws, liability, and the shelter's mission.
  - The meetings are collaborative in nature and solutions focused.
2. At- Risk Meeting Notes
- The Enrichment Team will provide detailed notes on:
    - the history of each dog that is considered at-risk and is to be discussed with the Leadership Team
    - efforts made to find a viable outcome for each dog that is considered at-risk.
  - The notes also will include any plans of action and a deadline for when that action will be completed or implemented.
  - The notes should be updated weekly with any efforts made by the team to seek placement options or evaluate.
  - Dogs that are on "attention" for Austin Pets Alive! (APA!) are sent in an email list that is named "At-Risk," but those dogs are not all considered at risk. Those that are will be discussed at length and have notes for the at-risk meetings.
    - This "attention/at-risk list" is sent to staff and volunteers who have requested to be included in a nightly email that identifies them.
3. Ad Hoc At-Risk Meeting
- In some cases, a dog may present with a serious safety risk that warrants taking immediate action. In this case, the Leadership Team may coordinate a meeting or other communications, to determine whether that dog is safe to place into the community.
4. Handling an At-Risk Dog
- If a ASO staff member has identified a dog has a history of inflicting a moderate, unprovoked bite or any severe bite:
    - ASO staff will notify the ASO Operations Manager, who will then consult with the Leadership Team to determine if staff should handle the dog.

### **803.10 Decision Making Criteria**

1. Factors that may be considered high risk, or considered as part of the evaluation process:
  - Demonstrated aggression to humans, most often including documented bites
  - Demonstrated aggression to animals, most often including severe injury or death
2. Criteria used for evaluation
  - Predictability
  - Provocation
  - Bite severity
  - Bite location (on the body)
  - Bite context
  - Number of bites
  - Severity of attack (drive, uninterruptability) to another animal
  - Increasing severity/bite escalation
  - Number of non-bite incidents

- Manageability
  - Perceived future risk and potential for harm
  - Legal requirements
  - Resources available
  - Other factors not noted above
3. Removing a dog off the list
- A dog may no longer be at-risk of euthanasia in several circumstances, including but not limited to those listed below and agreed upon by the Leadership Team.
    - If the circumstances of an incident(s) are investigated, and the incident(s) is/was less severe than originally thought.
    - If a management plan or modification plan has been enacted that has improved the safety of managing the dog.
    - If it is determined that the behaviors of the dog don't warrant the dog being at-risk
    - The dog is placed or euthanized.

### 803.11 Outcome Options

1. Management Plans and Public Safety
  - Placement options will be determined on an individual basis, based on the behavior and manageability of the dog.
  - The Enrichment Team and the Leadership Team will establish a management plan or guidelines for placement that may include factors such as a fenced yard, no other pets in the home, utilizing professional behavior support, etc.
  - These restrictions and plans will influence what placement options will be available.
2. Behavior Foster
  - In some cases, the Austin Animal Center may seek a foster to either further evaluate behavior or help work on behaviors.
    - This option is dependent on the behavior and manageability of the dog, as well as available fosters with the skill and/or home situation to be able to safely manage the dog.
    - This is not a true "placement" option but may be an available option to help make placement efforts more successful.
3. Behavior Consult Adoption
  - An at-risk dog may be adopted out based on their circumstances and perceived level of manageability in the community.
  - These dogs demonstrate behavior that the Enrichment Team and Leadership Team feel can be managed appropriately by an individual adopter, given that they fulfil the requirements (such as a fenced yard, experience with resource guarding, etc.) and can work with the Enrichment Team to create a plan for safety.
  - In some cases, Behavior Consult Adoption may not be considered safe for a particular dog, and not all adopters will meet the criteria to adopt that dog.
  - A thorough review of the dog's history (including bites, behavior challenges, etc.) and management needs will be discussed in detail.
  - Sometimes the adopter or foster will already be in contact with a dog trainer prior to taking the dog home.
  - The adopter or foster will always be provided a training voucher.
4. Partner organization placement

- Partners may opt-in to receive notifications that a dog is at-risk of euthanasia.
    - These are considered high-risk partners.
  - Pleas made to partners and high-risk partners may have a defined timeline for response.
    - A response to pull an animal needs to include an exit date no later than two weeks after the notification that was originally issued.
    - If a response is not received is not received by the designated timeline, then that lack of response will be considered as a decline to pull the animal from ASO.
  - Dogs that the Leadership Team do not feel safe placing directly into the community will be pled to partner organizations, unless they have caused Serious Bodily Injury, there is a legal ruling that would prevent this option, or they have inflicted a bite that is classified as severe and unprovoked.
  - AAC will consider sanctuary options on an individual basis and will allow placement if appropriate and if advocates are able to secure any necessary funding.
5. Euthanasia
- Dogs may be euthanized if they meet the specific criteria listed in Ordinance 20191017-025 regarding severity and provocation.
  - Dogs whose deadlines for placement options have passed will be euthanized if no viable options have been presented for consideration by the specified deadline.
    - These dogs will be euthanized at AAC.

### **803.12 Appeals and Time Providing for Advocacy**

#### **1. Notification Emails**

- If a dog is being considered for euthanasia, the Enrichment Team and Leadership Team will follow the provisions in Ordinance 20191017-025.
- If the dog does not meet the specific criteria listed in Ordinance 2019107-025, the provisions of City Code 3-1-26 must be followed:
  - The Enrichment Team, with Leadership Team oversight, will send an email including all ASO database paperwork, bite details, behavior challenges, pertinent behavior observations for the dog, the reason it is at-risk, and a time frame for advocacy. (See ASO\_BHT\_8 Email Notifications).
    1. The notice will also include the expected date of euthanasia if no viable live outcome option is identified.
    2. The Director or Deputy Director will ensure these notices are sent to the Assistant City Manager for situational awareness and to share, as they deem appropriate.
  - The notification will be emailed to staff, volunteers, and rescue partners who have previously requested to be notified before animals are euthanized and will be sent no less than 48-hours before euthanasia.
    1. Depending on the circumstances of the individual dog, the Leadership Team may decide that at least a 7-Day (but no more than 14-day) notification be sent instead of a 48-Hour notification.
  - At least two (2) business days prior to euthanasia, the Enrichment Team will reach out to the previous owner(s) who surrendered the dog (if applicable) by email and/or phone to notify them that the dog is scheduled for euthanasia, unless the person has requested not to be contacted.
  - At least two (2) business days prior to euthanasia, the Enrichment Team will reach out to the finder who surrendered the dog (if applicable) by email and/or

phone to notify them that the dog is scheduled for euthanasia, unless the person has requested not to be contacted.

- In some cases, if a viable placement option is proposed prior to the deadline, a brief extension period may be considered to allow for logistics, fundraising, transportation, etc.
  1. The period will be 72 hours but may be extended on a case-by-case basis, however, the organization, adopter, or foster must commit to pulling the dog before the deadline.
  2. This extension is granted by the Director, or their designee, in consultation with the Leadership Team.

**803.13 Euthanasia Notice/Process**

1. Final documentation
  - Prior to euthanasia, all relevant paperwork will be compiled, and the At-Risk Pathway form will be completed (see appendix).
  - This form must be signed by at least two members of the Leadership Team, one of whom must be the Director or Deputy Director.
2. Notifying vet staff
  - A member of the Leadership Team will mark the dog’s Kennel sub-status as “NOW EUTH,” create a memo type “EUTH” stating when the notification was sent and the timeframe has expired, and that the dog is approved to be euthanized.
  - A staff member will also contact a veterinarian or Animal Health Technician Lead to let them know a dog has been marked as NOW EUTH.
3. Whether staff/volunteers can visit
  - Staff and volunteers can visit with a dog cage-side before euthanasia if it is in a public kennel.
  - If staff and volunteers are still approved to handle the dog outside the kennel, they can do so up until euthanasia.
  - Treats should be within the dog’s normal diet (high value dog treats, peanut butter, etc.) as to not cause gastrointestinal upset and should be given the day before euthanasia.
4. Euthanasia will take place in the most humane way possible and in accordance with ASO-501 Euthanasia of Animals Procedure

**803.14 Appendix**

**At Risk Pathway**

**General Information**

Animal ID		Weight	
Name		Intake Date	
Intake Type		Age	

**Initial Steps – If moderate, unprovoked, or severe bite, discuss with Program Manager before moving forward.**

	<b>Date Completed</b>	<b>Completed By, Notes</b>
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If moderate, unprovoked, or severe bite, discuss with Manager before moving forward.		
Review of legal notes, if applicable		
APO review of provocation and severity, if needed		

**Enrichment Team Responsibilities**

	Date Completed	Completed By, Notes
Review human/animal interaction form(s)		
Review of incident notes		
Gather any additional incident, interaction forms, and owner surrender notes, if needed		
Contact previous owner(s), foster(s), volunteers, and finder to let know dog is at risk – see if we can provide any assistance for them to take ownership again		
Rescue, foster and media plea		
Cage side evaluations		
Hands on evaluation by BT, if safe		
Playgroup evaluation, if safe		
Gather media (pictures, video)		
Specialty (i.e., outside trainer, specialty partners, etc.), if warranted		
Behavior modification/management, if warranted		

**Multiple Team efforts**

	Date Completed	Completed By, Notes
Medical evaluation, if warranted/needed		

**Final Steps**

	Date Completed	Completed By, Notes
Review process results/notes with LT, if placement has not been found		
Send notification (48 hours, 7 or 14 days)		
Move forward with euthanasia if no appropriate options are found – ACM notified, if needed		

1. Euthanasia Process will be conducted in accordance with ASO-501 Euthanasia of Animals Procedure

**Staff Review:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chief/Deputy Review:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_