

August 2015

The ACO Voice

A Monthly Magazine from Animal Control Training Services

Stress Among ACO's – What We Knew in 1982



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Stress Among ACO's

By Charles E. Owens and Bill Hurt Smith

The following article appeared in the November/December 1982 issue of Community Animal Control. This was one of the first written articles regarding Animal Control Officer occupational stress. The article was authored by Dr. Charles E. Owens, Associate Professor in the Psychology Department at the University of Alabama; and Bill Hurt Smith of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the HSUS South-Central Area representative and the director of The HSUS Animal Control Academy. The article predicts that "as more research becomes available in animal control handlers there is no doubt that this profession will assume a position of being one of the top ranked stressful occupations in American society."

A number of studies have shown the role of one's occupation in the development of stress related problems including: coronary disease (Sales and House, 1971); peptic ulcers (Grayson, 1972); and other physical symptoms associated with stress (Combs & Goldman, 1973; Levi, 1970). The severity of this problem has been reflected by the increasing number of workers filing claims alleging that the cumulative stress of their jobs has caused them to become physically or mentally ill/socially disabled (Brodsky, 1979).

The Dilemma

Very little is known about the stress experienced by animal control officers in the performance of their job. Animal control is almost an invisible occupation. Most studies that report on occupations and job stressors tend to omit animal control in their sample. Terkel's (1975) number one best seller, *Working*, is an example. Terkel spent a number of years, traveling across the United States interviewing workers representing a number of different jobs. Included in his sample were a cross-section of jobs including gravediggers, farmers, strip miners, hookers, actors, bus drivers, policeman, salesmen, athletes, auditors, musicians, teachers, lawyers, and many others. There was not an animal control officer interviewed.

Perhaps part of the reason that animal control has not been studied as a distinct occupation is that they have typically been identified with other agencies and occupations (i.e., Health Department and law enforcement). However, while they share common job-related stresses with other occupations there are also unique stressors placed upon them in the performance of their responsibilities.

Primarily from self-reports by animal control officers, it is now believed that animal control is a highly stressful occupation, especially when euthanasia is involved (Owens, Davis, & Smith, 1981). Some euthanasia technicians report stressful reactions such as headaches, nervousness, tension, and other unpleasant symptoms including depression, irritability, and disturbed sleep patterns.

As animal control struggles to establish its own identity as a profession, and eliminate the negative image of "dog catchers", it is imperative that the stresses experienced be understood and studied separate and apart from other occupations.

The Nature of Occupational Stress

Occupational stress encompasses those conditions where job-related factors interact with individual characteristics to disrupt a person's physiological and/or psychological well-being. Under stressed conditions, the body reacts by accelerated heart palpitations, sweating, nervousness, and muscle tension. Stress reactions can lead to reduced efficiency, increased mistakes, apathy and irritability.

If the stress is continuous and constant, damage to the body may result and manifest itself through ulcers, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, and numerous other serious illnesses. Needless to say, stress has been cited as a casual factor in a number of psychological problems; both on the job, and in one's personal and social life.

There are a number of factors that contribute to stress from one's job including: lack of communication; job insecurity; lack of recognition; lack of input; public and political influences; lack of cooperation; unclear policy and procedure; role ambiguity; assignment patterns; and physical threat (Cheek, 1979).

It is generally acknowledged that certain occupations and professions contain more job-related stressors than others. Air controllers, law enforcement, and teaching are typically regarded as high stress occupations. In these high stress jobs more stressors are placed on the individuals and the inevitable result, in addition to personal discomfort, is job dissatisfaction.

Unfortunately very little research has been conducted on the stressors that animal control officers experience in the performance on their jobs. This study was conducted to assess the job related stresses experienced by animal control officers.

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The Population

Twenty-four animal control officers (ACO's) attending a two-week certification program at the Animal Control Academy, University of Alabama, comprised the sample.

Only seven (7) individuals had never performed euthanasia. The rest performed euthanasia only in emergency situations or from periods ranging from once a month to daily. Ten of the individuals had some college experience. Fourteen had completed high school or had received a GED equivalent. Four ACO's received a salary of under \$10,000 per year and four received over \$15,000 per year. The others in the sample earned between \$10,000 and \$15,000 annually.

Procedure

Following a general discussion of stress and its effects individuals were instructed to individually list the five most stressful events associated with their jobs and three methods for dealing with stress. They were then randomly assigned to four groups of five and one group of four and were instructed to arrive at a group consensus on the ranking of the stress areas. One individual was assigned as a group leader from each group to direct the discussion of the group. Each group leader then reported on the ranking of the stress areas from his or her group to the larger group.

Results

There were five general areas identified as stressful by all groups: euthanizing animals, interacting with the public, court appearances, relationships with supervisors/peers, and political/administrative procedures.

Euthanasia

Euthanizing animals was the area considered the most stressful. Individuals could identify specific physiological changes within their body as they prepared for and performed euthanasia. One individual, for example, mentioned that she had headaches from the time euthanizing started until the process was completed. Others described symptoms of muscle tightness, upset stomach, and not being able to interact with others before, during and after the euthanization process.

Even the animal control officers who did not euthanize and were only peripherally involved with euthanizing felt a certain amount of stress about the act being committed.

Interaction with the Public

The stress created by interacting with the public was the second highest stress area listed. Animal control officers felt overall that they were misunderstood by the public and

society in general. They saw themselves as having to do a thankless job made necessary by an insensitive public. They are required to interact with a hostile and irate citizenry, who are insensitive to the problem they themselves create. Often the public's response to interaction with an ACO is either one of resentment or contempt, or is of a condescending nature.

In a sense the problem is compounded by having to serve two masters - the animal control administration and the general public. A common complaint among ACO's is that those who supervise animal control do not really understand the stresses caused by dealing with people (public) who do not yet understand that an ACO is totally different from a "dog catcher" of days gone by.

The Court Process

As part of their job, animal control officers are involved with the court process in one way or another. Some must sign warrants for the arrest of a violator. Others go to court when defendants request a hearing by a judge rather than paying a fine and settling out of court.

Court appearances are often an unpleasant experience. Part of the reason for this is that judges are often unknowledgeable about ordinances and statutes and in some instances "play down" the seriousness of animal related violations. Defense attorneys attempt to discredit the officer's testimony and credibility. They are not able to find support for their uncertain roles as enforcement officers, even in the courtroom.

Similar to euthanasia, animal control officers cited specific physiological reactions such as trembling, nervousness, headaches, etc.

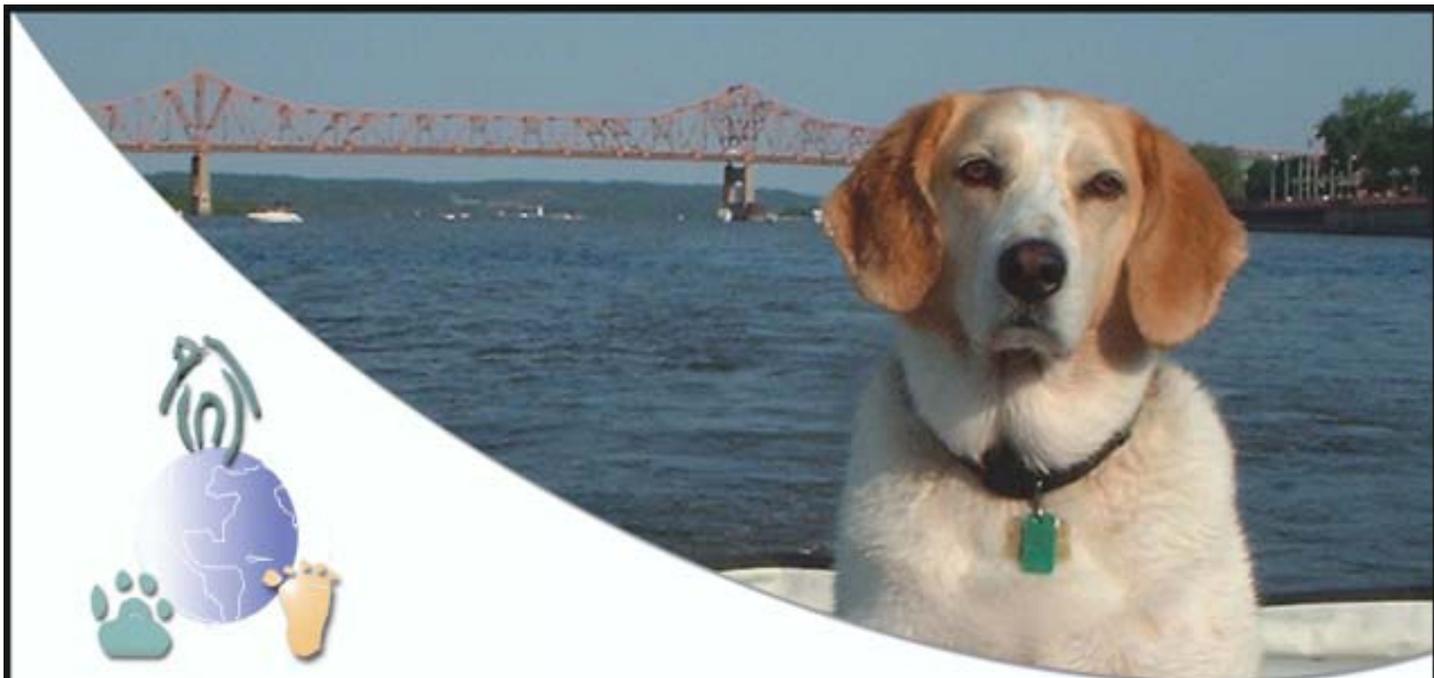
Relationship with Coworkers and Supervisors

The concerns in this area focused on an overall insensitivity and a lack of communication by both colleagues and supervisors. While there were some who had pleasant job relationships, most typically animal control officers did not share personal concerns and feelings with their colleagues or supervisors on the job.

Politics and Administrative Procedures

While not as pervasive as the other areas, animal control officers expressed feelings of being victims of political manipulations and administrative procedures and policies. Many felt that they were prevented from performing their jobs in the most efficient manner and did not feel that they could give input into critical decisions that affected their jobs.

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Personal Safety

Surprisingly, while it was discussed, threat to personal safety such as coming in contact with potentially dangerous animals did not reach a consensus level in the top five most stressful areas. It could be that this activity was more situational rather than chronic.

Coping with Stress

Overall, there was a pervasive sense of powerlessness as suggested by coping skills. Most typically the manner described to control and reduce stress was one of passivity and personal activity (i.e., physical exercise, hobbies, getting away, etc.) rather than more aggressive and assertive activities such as confrontation of the source of stress.

On the positive side, animal control officers did not generally consider themselves overworked or did not complain of low pay. There was also a feeling of job security but it seemed to exist at the expense of not "bucking the system."

Discussion

There is no doubt that animal control officers are in a high stress occupation. While animal control officers are confronted with the same frustrations and occupational nuances associated with any organizational structure or profession (lack of input, public and political influence, lack of cooperation, and lack of communication) they are exposed to additional stressful conditions that serve to intensify the magnitude of these stressors. They experience personal stress, as animal control officers flirt with danger and the threat of physical harm to themselves when they are required to capture and restrain potentially dangerous animals or give citations to law violators. They have to view and handle mangled and bloody animals. They make critical decisions about which animals will live and die. In some instances, they must kill animals whose only fault may be that no one wants them.

Finally, they are required to interact with an unappreciative and angry public, both in court and out of court. In a sense, an animal control handler is a synthesis of many stressful jobs: law enforcement, judge, physician, counselor, executioner, and mortician.

In most job situations these negative factors can be obviated if there are other more powerful rewards associated with the job. Whether or not there are enough pleasant rewards associated with the job of an animal control officer to offset the negative factors remains to be seen.

Recommendations

There has been no systematic research specifically on the long-term effects of stress on animal control handlers,

however, it is recognized that high job stress can lead to low morale, inefficiency, a high attrition rate, physical symptoms (headaches, ulcers, hypertension, etc.), and stress related behaviors (suicide, divorces, etc.).

It could possibly be that through a selective process those who become animal control officers have a high threshold for tolerating stress or it may be that the effects of high stress have not been recorded.

Perhaps the real danger in the long run may be to the profession itself. If animal control is to develop as an attractive and desirable profession and attract and retain qualified and desirable personnel then measures must be found to obviate and reduce both the job related and personal stressors.

It is clear that a stress management workshop is needed for animal control officers in general. Stress management workshops are currently being used for other high stress occupations including teachers, policemen, correctional workers and executives. A stress management workshop should entail giving animal control officers knowledge of how to reduce stress in their work environment by employing problem-solving techniques. In addition, a focus on assertiveness training is needed.

For those who euthanize animals, it would appear that a desensitization session is appropriate to reduce the stress associated with euthanasia. However, this must be clearly thought out for if there is no stress associated with "putting down animals," euthanasia specialists may become too complacent with the act and not agitate consciousness raising of the general public.

Stress Reducing Strategies

Stress related illnesses steal hundreds of staff hours from Animal Control efforts across the nation. Stress slows work behavior, causes internal friction and disrupts personal lives. Every year, talented, dedicated workers leave the profession to pursue less stressful careers. Although employers cannot eliminate inherent stress, there is increasing evidence that planned physical activity helps prevent stress related illness.

Traditionally, any physical fitness program undertaken by Animal Control workers was done on their own time and because of a personal commitment to good health. Through the efforts of enthusiastic employees shelters have participated in baseball and volleyball tournaments, running clubs, racquetball competitions and other forms of competitive recreation. These have taken the form of intermural competitions with other shelters and contests between staffs within a shelter. The Marin Humane Society has taken this idea one step further and has organized the 1982 Humane

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Society Games, a quasi-formal gathering of Northern California shelters. The Monterey SPCA provides support groups and speakers and has information on stress reduction and physical fitness available for all staff members.

Providing a formal, easily accessible training and fitness program for employees is still a relatively new idea, but, there is considerable interest expressed by Animal Control managers in cost-effective fitness/stress management programs. If the move toward employee welfare becomes a trend, it will mean happier, healthier employees and more productive animal control programs.

As more research becomes available in animal control handlers there is no doubt that this profession will assume a position of being one of the top ranked stressful occupations in American society.

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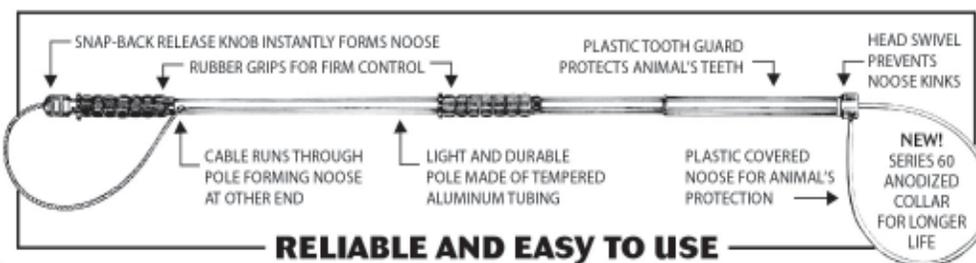


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Get in the ACTS!

By Mark Kumpf, OCDWA President

Get in the ACTS! – OCDWA Summer Conference a Success.

Dog Wardens and staff from around Ohio recently attended the Ohio County Dog Wardens Association 2015 Summer Training Conference on Kelley's Island. The conference, cosponsored by Animal Care Training Services and Merck Animal Health provided two days of training on everything from Dealing with Dangerous Dogs to What's New in Parasites! "Training is crucial to having a high performance agency," said Mark Kumpf, OCDWA President. "Animal Control is a dynamic profession and without current training, officers and staff are not able to provide the level of service the public now demands."

The traditional model for animal control training focused on week long academies with set curriculum. OCDWA has supported these courses; however, in today's animal control & welfare profession, many agencies are unable to send staff away for a week and, once completed, the academy courses do not have continuing education as a component. OCDWA is working to insure that all Dog Wardens and shelter staff

have the opportunity to attend training courses that cover real-world skill needs that aren't being met due to staffing and operational challenges.

State associations often find themselves as the trainer of last resort when laws & regulations fail to provide a structured training requirement. In Virginia, the Virginia Animal Control Association helped create the state training standard and offers both basic academy and in-service training opportunities for Animal Control Officers. In Ohio, with pending legislation mentioning a similar requirement, the board of OCDWA is working to establish clear goals and standards for basic and in-service training to benefit people and pets in the state. "Our motto is Striving to be Man's & Dog's Best Friend", said OCDWA Past President John Silva. "Our fellow Dog Wardens need the best training available and ACTS did a great job at the Summer Conference." Silva noted that the sessions were well received by the attendees and all enjoyed the professional, no-nonsense delivery. "Jeff Clemens did an outstanding job covering some difficult areas for animal control."

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Another feature of the conference was a legislative update from the County Commissioners Association of Ohio. Brian Mead, a legislative analyst, gave a summary of all active animal related legislative activity happening in Columbus. "Laws change. Dog Wardens need to be aware of things that can impact their jobs," said Treasurer Matt Granito, the Geauga County Dog Warden. "Our jobs are constantly changing with the law and events like our conference are one of the best ways for Dog Wardens to stay up on those changes." Ohio's legislature runs in two-year sessions so new legislation can move very slowly but sometimes, change is very quick with amendments added to "must pass" budget bills. Without training and updates, Dog Wardens can find themselves enforcing outdated statutes.



Janet Ferritto with Merck Animal Health was well received as she spoke on a variety of animal health related topics. Disease and parasite control are common problems in both field and shelter environments. "Dogs & cats face all kinds of challenges and it's great to get information and products that help them," commented Jessica France, an Animal Care Crewleader at the Montgomery County Animal Resource Center. "Janet has awesome stuff and makes learning about it fun!" Janet is a frequent guest speaker at OCDWA functions as well as shelter trainings all through her district. Merck has been a solid support of OCDWA and shelters in Ohio.

"Training is essential. If we fail to learn, we are failing the people and pets we are sworn to serve," said Kumpf. "Having support and quality instruction from organizations like ACTS and Merck are a key part of having a successful state association and well trained, competent Dog Wardens." OCDWA is currently planning the Winter Conference held in conjunction with the CCAO in Columbus. ACTS & Merck will be there to support Dog Wardens & the ODCWA. Thank you to the OCDWA Board, Jeff Clemens of ACTS and Janet Ferritto of Merck for making the summer conference a huge success.





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Finding Rover

By Brandi Blankenship, Finding Rover

Finding Rover, a free mobile app for identifying lost dogs in real-time, recently launched its platform and mobile application. More than 10 million pets go missing each year, according to The Humane Society of the United States. Finding Rover's state of the art facial recognition technology helps reunite more dogs with their owners by enabling anyone to instantly identify a missing dog on the spot simply by taking a photo on a mobile device.

Finding Rover features a comprehensive lost and found dog notification system that sends a push notification and social-feed photo-alert if a dog is lost or found within a 10-mile radius. The facial recognition technology makes the app's photo matching capability 98% accurate in matching Lost Dogs and Found Dogs.

Users can also view an interactive map of their area, which will show them where dogs have been lost or found, as well as the time and date. If a user spots a lost dog, he/she can take a photo either within the app, or upload a photo from a device's photo album. Once a dog has been found and identified through Finding Rover's facial recognition software, the finder will receive information on how to notify the owner.

"A dog is a beloved family member and if it goes missing it can be devastating to everyone involved," said John Polimeno, CEO and founder of Finding Rover. "We want to do everything we can to safeguard our dogs from being lost forever. Registering a dog on Finding Rover is another step all owners should take to further protect their cherished pet."

Key benefits include:

- Simple to register: Registration is easy through Facebook and email – all you need is a picture of your dog and a zip code.
- Easy to use: Anyone with a mobile phone can take a photo of a lost dog, which will be instantly posted on Finding Rover.

- Technologically advanced: Finding Rover spent two years with The University of Utah research and development (R&D) department creating its proprietary facial recognition technology. Finding Rover has the only technology that instantly recognizes a dog on the spot.

- Social: Finding Rover unites dog owners based on common interests and provides a forum for users to read up on the latest dog news, share content and interact.

- Free! Finding Rover is free to download.

Friends and family can also create a social "pack" with their dogs on Finding Rover to share common interests and interact, in addition to predefined packs on the app.

"People are turning to niche social media platforms, such as Finding Rover, as a way to communicate with people with similar interests," said Polimeno. "Finding Rover is for anyone who cares about dogs and wants to make sure they find their way back home, regardless of if they own a dog or not. Our goal is to be an essential part of dog lovers' day-to-day routine that they can rely on in the event of a missing dog."

Finding Rover is currently available on iOS, online at <http://findingrover.com/> and the company plans to release an app for Android this year.

To view an overview video, visit:

www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=nbRJozk_Im4.

About Finding Rover

Finding Rover is a free mobile app for finding lost dogs in real-time and provides a platform for dog lovers to interact and share content based on common interests. It helps reunite lost dogs with the families that love them and uses proprietary state of the art facial recognition technology to instantly identify a missing dog simply by taking a photo on a mobile device. Finding Rover was founded in 2013 and is based in San Francisco. For more information, visit <http://findingrover.com/>

The image shows a promotional graphic for the Finding Rover app. At the top left is the Finding Rover logo, a red paw print with a white heart inside. To its right is the text "Finding Rover" in a large, bold, black font, with the tagline "Protecting our best friends" underneath. Below this is the text "FREE service to help save lost dogs available now". In the center is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which shows a photo of a dog's face. Surrounding the phone are four numbered steps: 1) Download the app or visit the website; 2) Register by snapping a photo; 3) Report dogs lost and found; 4) Check for matches, and save a life. Below the phone is the text "Facial recognition for dogs" and "98% accurate | Push notification alerts | FREE". At the bottom right is the website "FindingRover.com".

ACTS Training Schedule

For a registration form, visit www.aco-acts.com or call 913-515-0080

Animal Control Protective Equipment Certification

August 13-14, 2015 - Yreka, California

Schedule of Training: Taser Certification; Pepper Spray Certification

Officer Safety for Animal Control Professionals

August 17-21, 2015 - Turlock, California

Schedule of Training: Tactical Communication; Officer Safety and Self Defense; Baton/Bitestick Certification; Safe Handling of Aggressive and Dangerous Dogs; Pepper Spray Certification; Chemical Immobilization Certification

Officer Safety for Animal Control Professionals

September 14-17, 2015 - North Kansas City, Missouri

Schedule of Training: Tactical/Interpersonal Communication; Officer Safety and Self Defense; Pepper Spray Certification; Safe Handling of Aggressive and Dangerous Dogs; Baton/Bitestick Certification

Officer Safety for Animal Control Professionals

September 21-22, 2015 - Beloit, Wisconsin

Schedule of Training: Tactical/Interpersonal Communication; Safe Handling of Aggressive and Dangerous Dogs

Officer Safety for Animal Control Professionals

September 23-25, 2015 - Chicago, Illinois

Schedule of Training: Baton/Bitestick Certification; Chemical Immobilization Certification; Safe Handling of Aggressive and Dangerous Dogs; Safe Animal Handling/Capture and Restraint Equipment

Animal Control Protective Equipment Training

September, 28-29, 2015 - Dayton, Ohio

Schedule of Training: Safe Animal Handling/Restraint Equipment (AM Session); Safe Animal Handling/Restraint Equipment (PM Session); Baton/Bitestick Certification

Chemical Immobilization Certification

September 29, 2015 - Weymouth, Massachusetts

Schedule of Training: Chemical Immobilization Certification

Training Program for Animal Control Professionals

October 5-9, 2015 - Hayden, Idaho

Schedule of Training: Tactical Communication; Safe Handling of Aggressive and Dangerous Dogs; Officer Safety and Self Defense; Investigative Techniques for Cruelty and Neglect Complaints; Illegal Animal Fighting; Understanding the ADA & Service Animals for ACO's & LEO's; Interview/Investigation Techniques; Evidence Law and Collection; Safe Animal Handling/Capture of Livestock

ACTS Training Schedule

For a registration form, visit www.aco-acts.com or call 913-515-0080

Training Course for Animal Control Professionals

October 12-15, 2015 - Battle Mountain, Nevada

Schedule of Training: Evidence Law and Collection; Animals as Evidence; Investigative Techniques for Cruelty and Neglect Complaints; Chemical Immobilization Certification; Citations, Dangerous and Vicious Declarations; Courtroom Preparation and Testimony

Training Course for Animal Control Professionals

October 28-30, 2015 - LaGrange, Georgia

Schedule of Training: Field Training Officer Certification; Interview and Investigation Techniques; Basic Animal Control Officer Investigations

Animal Control Officer Specialized Training Course

November 2-4, 2015 - North Kansas City, Missouri

Schedule of Training: Multiculturalism in Animal Control; Citations, Dangerous and Vicious Declarations; Interview and Investigation Techniques; Investigative Techniques for Cruelty and Neglect Complaints

Field Training Officer Certification for Animal Control Professionals

November 4-5, 2015 - Dublin, California

Schedule of Training: Field Training Officer Certification

County Animal Controls of Illinois & Kankakee County Risk Management

November 13, 2015 - Kankakee, Illinois

Presented by ACTS: Chemical Capture

Training Program for Animal Control Professionals

December 8-10, 2015 - Phoenix, Arizona

Schedule of Training: Field Reports and Evidence Collection; Dangerous Dog Investigation; Understanding Animal Behavior for LEO's; Understanding the ADA & Service Animals for ACO's/LEO's; Safe Handling of Aggressive and Dangerous Dogs; Safe Animal Handling/Capture and Restraint Equipment; Chemical Immobilization (certification)

Training Program for Animal Control Professionals

February 1-5, 2016 - Cullman, Alabama

Schedule of Training: Field Training Officer Certification; Multiculturalism in Animal Control; Understanding the "Link" in Animal Abuse; Chemical Immobilization (certification)