

No Kill Sheltering

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Betrayal at Asilomar:

How the nation's richest humane organizations failed shelter animals

**Prescription for a Healthy Board of Directors
A Primer on Socializing Shelter Animals**

BETRAYAL AT ASILOMAR



In 2004, a group of some of the largest, best funded shelters and their national allies came together to sign what they called the Asilomar Accords. Threatened by the growing success of the No Kill movement, they set out a vision for the future which will continue the wholly unnecessary killing of shelter animals. By contrast, nearly 6,000 groups and individuals have signed the Declaration of the No Kill Movement in the United States which calls upon shelters to bring an end to the killing.

No Kill is a revolution. And behind every revolution is a declaration a statement of grievances, a listing of rights and principles that underscore our great hope for the future. That is what the Declaration of the No Kill Movement in the United States encapsulates. It calls for a fundamental paradigm shift that rejects killing as a method for achieving results. It demands lifesaving programs and it sets out the inherent rights of shelter animals.

The Asilomar Accords, by contrast, are a cynical attempt by the architects of the status quo to try to co opt the No Kill movement. The Accords allow killing to continue, condemn feral cats to death, and seek to silence critics of the status quo. In fact, some of the Accords primary architects have a long, failed history at saving lives. One kills nearly 9 out of 10 cats they take in. Another killed over 75% of the dogs and cats they impounded. At their core, the No Kill Declaration and the Asilomar Accords are philosophically irreconcilable.

Indeed, the incompatibility of the two runs

throughout virtually every mandate of the documents. For example:

The Asilomar Accords allow feral cats to be killed without recrimination. The No Kill Declaration mandates that shelters adopt non lethal feral cat programs.

The Asilomar Accords allow dogs to be killed under draconian animal ordinances. The No Kill Declaration calls for the repeal of such laws.

The Asilomar Accords say shelters do not have to put programs and services in place that save lives. The No Kill Declaration mandates that they do.

The reason many animal control shelters and their national shelter allies such as the Humane Society of the United States have seized upon the Accords is because they do not require them to do anything substantive. They can continue to kill feral cats. They can continue to oppose TNR. They can continue to refuse working with rescue groups. They can continue

to keep volunteers out of the shelter. They can continue to push anti cat laws like licensing and bans on being outdoors. (For a complete critique of the Asilomar Accords, see Does the Road to No Kill Lead Through Asilomar, No Kill Sheltering, Volume I, Issue 2, March/April 2005.)

SPEAKING OUT FOR HOMELESS ANIMALS

The end result under the Asilomar Accords is that dogs and cats will continue to die in appalling numbers. The only difference now is that the Accords say we must not criticize. We must remain silent in the midst of the slaughter. But by our silence, we become co conspirators.

The No Kill Declaration, by contrast, provides a fully realizable and measurable roadmap for success. And it is available to anyone sincere in their desire to end the killing, willing to implement the programs and services to do so, and to open up the doors of the shelter to the light of public accountability. It is truly the only road to No Kill.

It is has been nearly twelve years since San Francisco became the first city to end the killing of healthy dogs and cats. The programs and services which made that possible are the same programs and services that allowed Tompkins County (NY) to achieve No Kill three years ago. We know how to save lives. We know how to end the killing. What are we waiting for?

We have known for over a decade that if No Kill is going to be achieved, shelters must put in place key programs that have proved successful at saving lives. Chief among these are high volume, low cost spay and neuter campaigns, a commitment to TNR for feral cats, a foster care program, a comprehensive adoption plan, and working with community groups such as rescue organizations and No Kill shelters. In this regard, varying philosophies are irrelevant and play no role. The only philosophy that matters is a commitment to the described lifesaving framework. Without it, shelters will be killing indefinitely and No Kill is simply not achievable.

KILLING IN THE FACE OF ALTERNATIVES

Why are some shelters still killing rather than sterilizing feral cats? Why do shelters still refuse to

work with rescue groups? Why do they continue to keep volunteers out? Five employees at the Animal Welfare League of Arlington, Virginia, for example, had long requested that the shelter start a foster program to save younger and sick animals rather than immediately killing them. But the Animal Welfare League s long time executive director refused, saying she did not want a foster care program at the shelter, decades after San Francisco s success demonstrated conclusively that it was a cost free way of saving lives. Instead, tired of killing savable kittens and other sick animals, staff in concert with caring volunteers began taking them home and then returning them when they were old enough or healthy enough to be adopted. In June of 2002, their lifesaving efforts were discovered by the director, however, and they were fired. According to the Asilomar Accords, we must remain silent in the face of this atrocity. But compassion does not allow it.

We are the generation that questioned the killing. We are the generation that has discovered how to stop it. Will we be the generation that does?

THE FUTURE OF OUR MOVEMENT

Whether we realize it or not, whether we appreciate it or not, whether we believe it or not, as history marches toward greater compassion for our four legged companions, No Kill s conquest of the status quo is inevitable. But if we remain silent at this moment, an opportunity will be lost to speed that process along. Our silence, therefore, has a body count. The price to be paid for our refusal to seize this opportunity will be the lives of millions of dogs and cats needlessly killed in shelters next year. And the year after that. And the year after that.

We have a choice. We can fully, completely and without reservation embrace No Kill as our future. Or we can continue to legitimize the two prong strategy of failure: adopt a few and kill the rest. It is a choice which history has thrown upon us. We are the generation that questioned the killing. We are the generation that has discovered how to stop it. Will we be the generation that does?

Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation.

Nelson Mandela, February 3, 2005