

'No kill' doesn't mean no killings

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A caveat: When you hear the term "no kill," ask for a precise definition because rarely does it mean exactly what people say.

Many - maybe most - no-kill shelters do, in fact, kill animals that are too sick to continue suffering or too vicious to be adopted safely.

The "natural" rate of these types of deaths in any given community is about five dogs and cats per 1,000 human residents per year, said Merritt Clifton, editor of *Animal People*, an advocacy publication with 30,000 subscribers worldwide.

Lane County shelters kill at twice that rate.

No-kill advocates would put down a dog or cat with an irremediable illness, said Nathan Winograd, a national-level proponent of no-kill policies.

But that doesn't mean putting down a cat with an upper respiratory infection or a dog with a broken leg, Winograd said.

No-kill advocates concede some dogs must be killed because they're dangerous, although some try to hold on too long, said Johnni Prince, executive director of the Greenhill Humane Society in Eugene.

"Some shelters strive to be no-kill, but there are animals there that shouldn't be: For instance, a dog that bites and has bitten repeatedly and is basically just being warehoused. Nobody is going to adopt that dog," she said.

If they do want to adopt, "This is the real world and a dog can get out. Do we want to be responsible for the child - or another person's animal - that gets attacked? It's an ethical dilemma. We struggle with it all the time," she said.

Some shelters maintain a no-kill philosophy by refusing notoriously vicious dogs.

The Florence Area Humane Society went no-kill in 2000, but it limit its intake of animals with complicated medical or behavioral issues. Still, the shelter killed 24 sick kittens and puppies last year.

The Lane County Animal Regulation Authority, conversely, kills hundreds of dogs and cats a year simply because the agency's 30 dog kennels and 40 cat cages were filled some weeks - although the statistics have taken a turn for the better in the early months of this year.

"We don't have the luxury of holding animals for an extended period of time, even if an animal is an adoptable animal," shelter director Mike Wellington said.

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