



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARD

Veterinary Euthanasia

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Introduction

The decision to euthanize an animal can be an emotional and difficult time for clients and for veterinarians. It can also raise complex issues for veterinarians when deciding whether to perform euthanasia, refuse to perform euthanasia, or recommend the performance of euthanasia. The College recognizes the complexity of decision-making by a veterinarian when recommending euthanasia for an animal or group of animals. This standard sets out the College's expectations related to euthanasia performed by a veterinarian.

Definitions

Client: Client means, with respect to a veterinarian, the owner of an animal(s), group of animals, or herd(s) that the veterinarian is treating, an authorized representative of the owner or an individual who the member reasonably determines is acting in the interest of the animal(s).

Veterinary Euthanasia: Veterinary Euthanasia is the practice of deliberately ending the life of an animal or group of animals using humane methods that minimize pain and distress.

Practice Expectations

A veterinarian meets the *Professional Practice Standard: Euthanasia* when they:

1. Perform euthanasia only in the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) or in accordance with the authority provided by provincial and/ or federal animal welfare legislation.

2. Verify the legal ownership and identification of an animal or group of animals, to the best of their ability, prior to performing euthanasia.
3. Document in the medical record that the client has provided informed client consent prior to the performance of euthanasia in accordance with the *Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*.
4. Recommend that a client seek out another veterinarian who performs euthanasia if they do not perform euthanasia, or refuse to perform euthanasia in a particular case, inclusive of reasons.
5. Explain the process of performing euthanasia, including the visible effects that may occur, the length of time the process will take, and any after-effects that may be expected, if the client wishes to remain present during the process.
6. Follow species-specific accepted practices with respect to the method of performing euthanasia, and ensure that:
 - the method chosen is humane;
 - the method chosen minimizes pain and distress; and
 - the method chosen provides for safe animal handling and restraint, including the safety of the veterinarian, veterinary team, and other individuals present.
7. Delegate the performance of euthanasia after determining the necessary level of supervision (immediate, direct, or indirect) for the task in accordance with the *Professional Practice Standard: Delegation*.
8. Confirm the death of the animal or group of animals.

Disposal of Remains

9. Clearly identify the remains of the animal or group of animals following the performance of euthanasia, as applicable to the practice context.
10. Assure themselves with a reasonable degree of certainty of a client's preferences with respect to the method of disposal of the remains of the animal or group of animals.
11. Understand that the disposal of the remains of any animal must be executed in accordance with the provisions of the *Veterinarians Act*, the *Environmental Protection Act*, the *Dead Animal Disposal Act*, Minimum Standards for Veterinary Facilities, any applicable municipal by-laws, and any other legal requirements. Consider and employ biosecurity best practices to avoid biosecurity hazards.

Additional Considerations

12. Understand that they have an obligation to report animal abuse or neglect to a provincial animal welfare inspector when they have reasonable grounds to believe that an animal or group of animals have been abused or neglected in circumstances that require euthanasia.
13. Ask questions about biting or other contact incidents that could result in the transmission of the rabies virus to a person that occurred within the 10 days preceding the planned euthanasia of an animal or group of animals. Manage the euthanasia of an animal or group of animals involved in such incidents in accordance with the relevant provincial legislation and regulation as outlined in the *Legislative Overview: Rabies*.

Legislative Authority

R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: General, s. 1, 17(1) 21, 17(1) 22, 17(1) 22.1, 18, 19, 27, 28, 33(2)(f) (*Veterinarians Act*)

Animals for Research Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. A.22

R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 557, Communicable Diseases - General s. 2 (*Health Protection and Promotion Act*)

O. Reg. 106/09: Disposal of Dead Farm Animals (*Nutrient Management Act*)

O. Reg. 105/09: Disposal of Deadstock (*Food Safety and Quality Act*)

Environmental Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.19 and regulations

Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019, S.O. 2019 c. 13

Livestock Community Sales Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. L.22

O. Reg. 31/05: Meat, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 20, s. 84.1 (*Food Safety and Quality Act*)

Minimum Standards for Veterinary Facilities, Titles 6 and 12, clause 13.4

Health of Animals Act (S.C. 1990, c. 21)

Other References

The following can be found on the College's website at www.cvo.org:

Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent

Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records

Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug

Professional Practice Standard: Dispensing a Drug

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Dispensing a Drug

Professional Practice Standard: Extra-Label Drug Use
Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Extra-Label Drug Use
Professional Practice Standard: Use of Compounded Drugs in Veterinary Practice
Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Use of Compounded Drugs in Veterinary Practice
Professional Practice Standard: Management and Disposal of Controlled Drugs
Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Management and Disposal of Controlled Drugs
Professional Practice Standard: Delegation
Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship
Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship
Professional Practice Standard: Humane Animal Handling and Restraint
Position Statement: Reporting Animal Abuse or Neglect
Legislative Overview: Rabies
Legislative Overview: Mandatory Reporting

Resources

Codes of Practice – National Farm Animal Care Council
American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2020 Edition

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website (www.cvo.org) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.