

Stayin' Alive Long Beach's Response to Claims Made by LBACS Press-Telegram, October 4, 2013

Ted Stevens, Manager of Long Beach Animal Care Services (LBACS), has responded to a number of Stayin' Alive Long Beach's findings reported in the Press Telegram article, published earlier this week, calling them "misleading" and "unfair and false."

Here, Stayin' Alive Long Beach offers our response to Stevens' claims, which do not bear up under examination of data obtained from LBACS by Stayin' Alive under the California Public Records Act.

Quotes are from the Press-Telegram article, "Report critical of Long Beach Animal Care Services euthanasia rate," published on October 4, 2013. Stayin' Alive's responses are in bold italics below LBACS's claims from the article.

1. LBACS: "The 53 percent euthanasia statistic [cited by Stayin' Alive Long Beach] lumps dogs and cats, which [Stevens] says is an unfair representation."

SALB's Response: In calculating the euthanasia rate of companion animals at a shelter, one must include all companion animals – dogs and cats – in the rate. Choosing to highlight or report only the rate of the animals that the shelter euthanizes the least frequently skews the data and by definition the resulting number can't be called a companion animal euthanasia rate. LBACS also euthanized 32% of dogs, 75% of cats, 18% of puppies and 78% of kittens in 2012.

2. LBACS: "Only 29 percent of dogs are euthanized..."

SALB's Response: LBACS euthanized 1281 dogs in 2012, an increase of 2.6% over the previous year. They also lost 4 dogs and 7 dogs died in their kennels. Minimizing the number of dogs that LBACS euthanized in 2012 by saying "only 29%" denies the significance of these facts.

3. LBACS: "...and the majority of cats [euthanized] are feral..."

SALB's Response: Of the approximately 3700 cats and kittens LBACS euthanized last year, LBACS euthanized 975 "feral" cats, up from 940 in 2011 – yet another increase in the death rate at the shelter over the past year.

Scared cats often act feral in the shelter environment; therefore, it can't be known how many of these cats were truly "feral" as opposed to fearful, "outside" cats who previously had owners before being impounded.

Also, nationally-known humane organizations, including the SFSPCA, ASPCA and the Humane Society of the United States advocate for a program of "Trap-Neuter-Release," stating in a jointly-written white paper recently, "Admitting healthy dogs and cats solely to euthanize them, to keep them in stressful, crowded conditions, or to euthanize another animal already in the shelter does not serve animals, shelters, or the public." (California Sheltering Report, p.16. www.cashelteringreport.org).

4. LBACS: "...or too young to be adopted."

SALB's Response: In 2012, 682 of the kittens LBACS euthanized were able to eat on their own. Those kittens could have been placed into foster homes, had a foster program existed at LBACS.

The 1,557 kittens that LBACS euthanized that were still drinking mother's milk:

- *Could have been placed into rescues if the shelter maintained positive relationships with rescues rather than overregulating them.*
- *Could have been placed into foster homes if the shelter operated a training program for the public led by knowledgeable rescue volunteers*

LBACS currently operates neither a foster nor a volunteer training program for neonatals.

5. LBACS: "The 41,000 number is also misleading because dogs, cats, rabbits, snakes, fish and other wildlife are included in the mix," Stevens said.

SALB's Response: This number is only misleading if we don't say that it includes other animals. LBACS's records reveal that it euthanized 40,679 companion animals over the past 6 years. The Stayin' Alive Long Beach report states that the number 40,679 includes companion and other animals. The decline in euthanasias that LBACS claimed at their 2013 Open House (a decrease of 2000 euthanasias over 6 years) also included animals other than companion animals. The difference is that this report says the number includes other animals, and LBACS's statement at the Open House does not.

As our report notes, LBACS finds it convenient to use wildlife numbers when it helps to inflate their adoption rate. Their protests on this point fall flat, since we explicitly state that the number cited includes other animals. More puzzling, however, is that this stance completely contradicts their “business as usual” practice of counting wildlife as an adoption number. If this means that LBACS is changing its practice and will no longer report wildlife as adoptions, Stayin’ Alive Long Beach supports that change.

6. LBACS: [Stevens] added that the reason why the adoption rate is low is because SPCA, the nonprofit the city agency partnered with 12 years ago, handles most of Long Beach’s adoptions and those numbers are counted for the SPCA, not the city.

SALB’s Response: This did not stop LBACS from claiming those numbers in their save rate at their 2013 Open House, thereby misleading the public. The fact that LBACS believes spcaLA should handle most of Long Beach’s adoptions is precisely the point here. spcaLA and LBACS are separate entities that have a landlord-lessee relationship and nothing more – this is explicitly spelled out in the current agreement between the two agencies. spcaLA only takes in 28% of the animals that LBACS needs to find homes for, leaving the rest for LBACS to place. Yet LBACS euthanizes 74% of the animals that spcaLA doesn’t place. To say that “spcaLA does the adoptions for the shelter” is to say that 74% of the animals not taken by the spcaLA are condemned to death, and indeed, as of now, that is the case.

7. LBACS: ““The SPCA also offers neonatal cat care and other programs for free for the city, which is also boosting its funding for spay and neuter programs,” Stevens said.”

SALB’s Response: spcaLA has no accountability to LBACS because according to LBACS itself, no agreement exists between them as to how many and which types of animals spcaLA will take from them. spcaLA’s programs benefit the 28% of LBACS animals that they take in; not the 72% of the whole that are left at LBACS. LBACS needs to expand the shelter’s capacity to care for unweaned kittens by implementing its own neonatal kitten fostering program.

8. Stevens said he also shares his information monthly with rescue groups and other community members.

SALB’s Response: We take this to mean the PAWS group that meets at the

shelter. LBACS needs to be transparent with its numbers to the citizens of Long Beach, not to a select group of people with “insider status” at the shelter.

9. “I show everything in my statistics,” [Stevens] said. “We’re completely upfront with them.”

SALB’s Response: The data on which Stayin’ Alive Long Beach based its report comes directly from LBACS, obtained through the California Public Records Act. This information is not otherwise easily accessible to the general public. We observe that this does not constitute a “completely upfront” way of communicating with the public on this very important matter.

10. LBACS: “Data [contained in Stayin’ Alive’s report] is misleading.”

SALB’s Response: All data were obtained from LBACS. If the data are misleading, this is because LBACS supplied Stayin’ Alive Long Beach with misleading data.

Mr. Stevens’ comments appear to be attempts to deflect criticism of a city-run animal shelter that is underperforming with regard to saving shelter animals’ lives when compared with other progressive shelters. The citizens of Long Beach have a right to have their taxpayer dollars used in a way that reflects their values as an animal-loving community. Informing the public of the practices and policies in place at LBACS is part of Stayin’ Alive’s mission, and we will continue to bring evidence-based recommendations to LBACS and the City of Long Beach in the hopes that LBACS will one day truly become the safest city for animals and people.