



Animal handling action plans in the veterinary setting

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Animal handling action plans

Trainer's overview

To help your employees get the most out of their training sessions, it is suggested that:

- The training sessions should be conducted in a relatively quiet and uninterrupted environment.
- The sessions should be held the same time and day of the month (e.g., first Tuesday at 12:30 p.m.).
- Employee handouts should be given out along with writing utensils.
- The trainer's guide, employee handout, and references are reviewed.
- The sessions are kept to a maximum of 20 minutes.
- Personal examples of incidents or prevention techniques that worked for you should be included.
- Ensure all employees who are present sign the safety training sign-in sheet for documentation purposes.
- If some employees were not present, a second training session should be given.



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The Employee Health & Safety exposures and loss prevention efforts are the responsibility of your company. Safehold's Risk Control services are intended to assist you and your management with evaluating potential exposures to loss and methods to minimize exposure. These services do not necessarily include every possible loss potential, code violation, or exception to good management practices.

Trainer's guide

What you need to know about animal handling in the animal services setting:

Animal handling injuries represent the majority of work-related injuries suffered in the animal services workplace. Animal hazards include injuries due to lifting, sudden movements, bites and scratches, and zoonotic diseases.

Many animals will become aggressive or unpredictable during animal services visits. Pain, fear, and anxiety are major underlying causes for many animals. However, while the causes may vary, all team members should receive routine training on safe handling techniques.

Animal handling techniques should be taught to inexperienced team members and used consistently by everyone. Generally, slow and deliberate movements should be used around animals. Workers should approach animals from the front while avoiding their blind spots. It is common for animals to have a fear of the unknown, or a fear of what happened to them last time they were in a similar environment. A stressed animal can react violently, so there should always be sufficient personnel present to ensure safe restraint.

Signs of danger may vary between breeds and species and may include raised fur, flattened ears, twitching tails, or bared teeth. Employees should remain constantly alert when handling animals, watching for warning signs of animal aggressiveness and fear. **If** possible, workers should avoid handling any agitated animal until they are in a calmer state. Extra caution should be used when handling animals that are sick, hurt, or new mothers.

Aggressive (or sick) animals should be identified to ensure that everyone uses extra caution around them. **If** workers must capture/restrain animals or administer treatments that may cause pain, they should do so with assistance from animal capture/restraint devices and the assistance of additional team members. All employees should use extreme caution when giving injections and handling sharp objects around animals.

Who's at risk?

Each facility must evaluate their own situation, and employees should know the following:

- Who are the employees that physically handle animals?

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Trainer's guide (continued)

- Are there facility-wide rules in place relating to methods and procedures for handling animals?
- How can I monitor the actions of my employees while they are with patients?
- Where can I get the appropriate information to set up and establish rules relating to animal handling?

Best practice

A best practice is to proactively implement a routine to effectively protect employees, property and equipment utilizing engineering and work practice controls. See website links in the *Questions* section for resources.

Engineering controls

Supervisors should understand and document:

- What are the specific tasks performed by each team member? *Use of a Job Safety Analysis process will help.*
- What actions have been taken to implement a safe environment within the organization? *Use of a 360-management survey will help identify opportunities for improvement.*
- What are the follow up actions when an employee is involved in an accident? *Ensure post incident review protocols are in place and include root cause analysis.*

Workplace controls

Work practice controls are meant to reduce the likelihood of exposure through regular refresher training, **reminding**, and reinforcing of policies and procedures. Controls include, but are not limited to:

- Each animal should receive a behavior evaluation as part of their medical history and examination. If the animal leans toward aggressiveness, take any steps necessary to protect yourself from it.
- Aggressive animals should be handled with calm and confidence.
- Caution should be taken with animals on a leash around the workplace area.

- Work areas should be constantly swept, disinfected, and equipment should always be properly stored.
- Floor mats, or gripped epoxy floor paints will also reduce the risk of slips and trips while leading or carrying animals.
- Avoid sudden movements and eye contact which will incite an already agitated animal further.
- When an employee is in a difficult situation, a **barrier** should be used between the animal and the employee so that the animal cannot gain access to do harm.
- Suitable and appropriate restraint of animals during treatment is critical.

Questions for discussion

Question: Who has responsibility for implementing an animal handling safety action plan?

Answer: Management, staff, and a designated person in charge of safety.

Question: What are some signs that the animal I am handling may be agitated, sick, or hurt?

Answer: Aggressive sounds, body posture, raised fur, flattened ears, twitching tails, or bared teeth.

Question: What are some actions I can take to reduce exposures to injury while handling animals?

Answer: Proper restraint when working with or handling a threatening animal is a good start. Animals should be handled calmly and confidently, with slow and deliberate movements. Clear and clean work areas are also critical for safe movements. When danger arises, no employee should be alone.

Question: Where else can I go to obtain additional safety information?

Answer: Many websites can be helpful. Some examples include:

Safety Vet: <http://www.safetyvet.com>

Recommended Practices for Safety and Health Programs:
www.osha.gov/safetymanagement

Fear Free Pets: <https://fearfreepets.com>

Questions?

Please complete the sign-in sheet.

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Employee handout

Overview

Even small or typically docile animals may be dangerous to humans and other animals, when they find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings such as a pet hotel or veterinary office. Worse yet, what happens when an animal remembers an unpleasant experience it had the last time it was at this location? An animal under stress, or in fear, is far more likely to react violently, so it is critical that everyone understands hazards and has been trained in controls for those hazards.

An attacking animal may scratch or bite. Either of these actions have the potential to lead to not only painful or serious injuries, but many types of zoonotic diseases as well. Everyone in the facility must be well versed in correct handling techniques for all animals, and these techniques should be consistently used. At times, animal restraint becomes critical, and when used correctly, will prevent harm to employees as well as animals in the facility.

In the following sections of this document, we have assembled a quick list of some warning signs to assist in spotting an agitated animal, as well as a number of valuable steps that can be put in place to minimize injury potential and other exposure to danger.

Warning signs

1. Is the animal visibly hurt, sick, or a new mother?
2. Does the animal have any of the following:
 - a. Raised fur
 - b. Bared teeth
 - c. Flattened ears
 - d. Twitching tail
3. Has a recent treatment of the animal caused it pain?

Preventative measures

An animal's owner might be asked about the animal and its tendencies. This will often provide insight about an animal's history or current state of mind.

- Slow and deliberate movements are best used around animals.
- Animals showing aggression should be identified so everyone knows to use extra caution when approaching. If at all possible, these animals should be avoided as they may calm down on their own.
- All animals should be approached from the front so they will not be unnecessarily surprised.
- All employees should be certain that in case of accident, there are enough personnel in place to properly restrain or separate the aggressive animal from danger.
- Maintaining clean and clear work areas will reduce the potential for slip and fall, as well as spread of disease through unclean materials or sharp objects.
- Floor mats, non-slip shoes, and appropriate floor paints can reduce the exposure to slip and falls while leading or carrying an animal.

Conclusion

All animals that come into the facility should be handled calmly, and with confidence. However, when a patient is showing clear signs of aggression, fear, or anxiety, team members must know how to handle the situation safely and effectively. This must be done without making the situation worse for the animal, their owner, employees, or other pets and owners in the facility.

New employees that come into the facility may be trained by the experienced workers as well as provided with all necessary documentation to ensure a safe and successful tenure. As with any of the many important issues facing employees, the handling of animals should be an ongoing and recurring theme for safety meetings and discussion topics