



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –
Public Information Office
Contact: Sally Shutt, Communications Manager
Telephone: 910-437-1921
E-mail: sshutt@co.cumberland.nc.us

February 17, 2010

Animal Services Halts Pet Adoptions, Battles Canine Distemper

FAYETTEVILLE – Cumberland County Animal Services has halted all pet adoptions for the next two weeks as it battles an outbreak of canine distemper. At the end of the two-week period, Animal Services Director Scottie Harris will reevaluate the situation to determine if adoptions can resume.

Dr. John Lauby, the Animal Services' contract veterinarian, recommended the action, along with the following measures:

- Decontamination of the entire shelter, with particular attention to the three puppy rooms. Staff will disinfect walls and ceilings, in addition to routine procedures.
- Additional staff procedures such as changing gloves after contact with each puppy, disinfecting arms after each pet contact, and increasing the amount of disinfectant used in cleaning.
- Increased ventilation in the three puppy rooms. Fans have been brought in and outside doors opened.

“This is a really difficult situation,” said Lauby, who suspects the outbreak is the result of a sick dog that entered the shelter.

Out of 167 dogs adopted or rescued from the shelter since Jan. 1, 28 have been returned or reported as being euthanized due to various illnesses. From November to January, there were five, Harris said.

In January, Harris called for additional preventive measures to eliminate cross-contamination because of the increased number of illness reports. In the early stages, distemper resembles kennel cough. He called in Lauby, the veterinarian, today when those measures were not showing results.

-more-

This morning, Animal Services staff began calling individuals who have adopted dogs since Feb. 1 to explain to them that canine distemper cases have been reported in the shelter.

Canine distemper primarily attacks puppies. Older dogs are much less susceptible since they have usually been vaccinated.

“The cold weather puts dogs under extreme stress, and puppies are the most susceptible,” Lauby said. “Even by following routine protective measures, in weather like this, you have to go to extreme measures to keep it from becoming an epidemic.”

Animal Services will continue to pick up stray animals and accept those that are dropped off, Harris said. While adoptions are on hold, Animal Services will only euthanize dogs that show symptoms of illness.

“Right now, we are not going to euthanize any animals, except those that are sick, until this can be evaluated further,” Harris said.

Pets that are under protective custody will be isolated and can only be euthanized under court order. Lauby also recommended that the dogs in protective custody be vaccinated against distemper.

Distemper symptoms include gooey eyes, nose discharge, fever, poor appetite, cough, vomiting, diarrhea and callused nose and foot pads. As the disease progresses, seizures may follow.

-end-