

Animal Control in Allegan County



Allegan County is a large and very diverse area, with large suburban centers anchoring all four corners of the County. We also have a wonderfully vibrant and historic central section punctuated by the City of Allegan. Still, we have the unique quality of being considered rural. One of the hallmarks of Allegan County's legacy is its agri-business along with the love of animals and animal husbandry.

The Sheriff's Office is charged with the enforcement of State Laws and County Ordinances related to the control of domestic animals. The Sheriff's Office is also responsible for the operation of the only animal shelter located in Allegan County. Currently we have one full-time animal control officer and one part-time officer. We dedicate about 80 personnel hours per week to animal enforcement and control. Our annual budget for Animal Control including operation of the animal shelter is about \$190,000 this year.

Our Animal Control officers handle around 2,000 calls for service each year. They take control of about 850 dogs and 1,100 cats in a year's time. One of the increasing areas of concern is the number of abandoned or abused horse complaints that we are receiving. Yes, we must take custody of abandoned and abused livestock as well as household pets. We respond 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to emergency animal control issues. In addition, we respond to approximately 330 animal bite calls each year. We investigate animal cruelty complaints, unrestrained livestock complaints and barking dog complaints. Other duties that our Animal Control officers are responsible for include the trapping and removal of stray animals. They are also responsible for inspection and licensing of dog kennels in the county. Our animal control officers also assist our deputies with traffic control at accident scenes and take control of animals that may be part of a crime scene. If our Animal Control officers are not available, one of our uniformed deputies will respond. They may not be able to take immediate action because they don't have access to our animal transport equipment and trucks, but they will notify Animal Control of the issue.

As well as the enforcement of domestic animal laws, our Animal Control officers also operate the animal shelter. Currently our shelter hours are 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday through Friday. When the Animal Control officers arrive at the shelter in the morning they must respond to approximately 30 to 40 voice mail messages regarding animal issues that have occurred during the previous 24 hours. In addition, they are dispatched to calls by Central Dispatch. Because there is no clerical support at Animal Control, they must type their own reports. The Sheriff's Office utilizes inmate workers to assist with the day-to-day operation of the shelter. We have a number of volunteers and youths from the Cheever Treatment Center that also help with shelter operations. We try to return to the owner, adopt out, or find homes through volunteer organizations for the animals that come to the shelter. In 2006, we successfully returned, adopted out or turned over to other volunteer groups 552 cats and dogs. If you are ever interested in adopting a pet,

volunteers arrange for the display of our available adoptees at www.petfinder.com. We have successfully adopted out pets across North America.

Our Animal Control officers must complete 100 hours of training offered by Michigan State University and be mentored by a local veterinarian in order to be certified as an Animal Control officer. They must also take CPR training, weapons training, training in drug identification, meth lab identification training and training in child protection laws. Our Animal Control officers also offer informational sessions to service groups and offer programs to Allegan County schools on what their job duties include.

This is a tough job. Our Animal Control officers work very hard. It takes a special person to deal with animals and animal issues. The citizens of Allegan County have a real “soft spot” for animals. Still, when things don’t go right, issues with animals produce very strong emotional responses. These officers take this emotional baggage home with them every night – just like our deputies. So, the next time you see one of our Animal Control trucks on the road – give them a friendly wave. They’ll appreciate it.

Until I write again, Stay Safe.

Blaine Koops
Your Sheriff