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COMPREHENSIVE ANIMAL CONTROL

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The Vancouver Regional Branch of the B.C.S.P.C.A. operates eight Animal Control Facilities and an Animal Clinic in the Greater Vancouver Area. The area of operation embraces 558.58 square miles, with a total human population of approximately 1.1 million and an estimated cat and dog population of 400,000 to 500,000. The Branch is directly concerned with animal control in fourteen municipalities and also assists indirectly with dog control in a further five.

In 1974 the Executive Committee of the Vancouver Regional Branch of the B.C.S.P.C.A. began investigating factors that influence the pet population. Specific attention was given to the changing sociological environment of the area as well as techniques for the control of the pet population and its growth. Some of the sociological problems found in the survey were as follows. Massive increases in multi-unit dwellings such as condominiums and apartment blocks had changed the living space available for both humans and animals. In addition, the actual role of the dog in society had changed in many instances. People were choosing larger dogs to fulfill the role of both pet and guard dog. Dog sizes increased over five years from 22.4 pounds to 51.8 pounds,

The pet statistics had changed drastically during the same five year period. The dog population doubled, as did the number of dogs being impounded. The ratio of dogs claimed to dogs impounded in the past three years deteriorated from 47 percent to 27 percent in some areas. The uncontrolled growth of the feline population resulted in the destruction of six hundred and seventy five cats in one day in 1976, Unneutered male dogs, which were responsible for 81 percent of aggressive attacks or bitings and nearly 100 percent of sheep killings, were also a major problem.

Regulating authorities attempted to improve animal control by instituting impoundment fees and a license differential to encourage sterilization. These initiatives, however, were not sufficient in that they did not affect the root problem, irresponsible pet ownership. In response, the Vancouver Regional developed Operation Tattoo.

Control Of The Pet Population - Operation Tattoo

Operation Tattoo hoped to solve one of the basic problems in effective dog control - namely, the inability to establish positive ownership of a dog running at large. Studies indicated that 72 percent of all dogs entering the jurisdiction of the Vancouver Regional Branch do not wear any form of identification. The percentage of injured but unidentifiable dogs is in excess of 80 percent.

The S.P.C.A. and Pound Operations receive thousands of calls from dog owners who have lost their dogs. The descriptions of the lost dogs are often vague, inaccurate and demonstrate the public's ignorance of the various types of breeds. It is almost impossible to match these vague descriptions to the dogs held in different pounds.

The problem of identification could be solved if all dogs are tattooed with an identification number which is kept in a master file for British Columbia, Tattooing has usually been regularly used only for pedigree dogs but modern living and sociological conditions now dictate that this method be extended to all dogs, The question now is whether this concept is acceptable to the pet owner and the regulating authority.

Responsible dog owners have accepted Operation Tattoo and, to date, approximately 16,000 animals have been tattooed. The benefits of tattooing include the fact that a lost dog can be returned immediately rather than spending time in a holding facility with exposure to disease and stress; the fact that owners can be quickly notified of injured or dead animals; and the fact that dog napping is reduced.

The advantages of the program to the regulating authorities are considerable. A tattooed animal can be positively identified as being the same dog that was picked up before, thereby enabling the identification of irresponsible owners. Secondly, the number of animals that are left in shelters to be destroyed will be reduced because the owner, with ownership established, must pay the impounding fee. Finally, the program provides for immediate and quicker return of animals and thus maximizes the use of the pound staff. Many man hours will be saved as fewer dogs will have to be admitted in, fed and housed, then subsequently released.

The institution of Operation Tattoo in the District of North Vancouver in 1974 has produced positive results. The proportion of animals claimed increased from 32 percent in 1974 to 78 percent in 1980. This produced more revenue and improved the financial situation. According to new regulations, all animals leaving the shelter be tattooed and neutered. In addition, some members of the Vancouver Veterinary Academy have agreed to tattoo dogs during elective surgery and forward the records to the Branch. Members of the public who own registered dogs may have their animals on file for a fee of \$3.00. There are no charges for animals owned by blind persons as "seeing eye" dogs.

The Branch is also trying to make licensing and tattooing of guard or "attack" dogs mandatory.

There has been a remarkable increase in more responsible dog owners in those municipalities that have adopted Operation Tattoo. In the District of North Vancouver the proportion of animals claimed increased from 32 percent in 1974 to 78% in 1980. In the majority of cases, the ratio of dogs claimed to those impounded has continued to increase after the initial survey date of 1980. In addition, the number of dog licenses issued in the municipality has increased. Presently, the Municipal Act is being amended to allow regulating authorities to have by-laws requiring impounded dogs to be tattooed prior to release to the claiming owners.

Control of the Pet Population - Spay/Neuter Clinics

It is now generally accepted that part of the solution to the control of the pet population requires some type of program to reduce the breeding potential. Chemical methods have been tried but have not been particularly effective. Animal owners are not conscientious enough to ensure that the contraceptives are administered regularly. There are health problems associated with the contraceptives. Also, the chemical contraceptives require a continuing outlay of money which is a powerful disincentive. Other methods, such as the injection of sclerosing agents into the epididymis of the male or immunological control are being developed but are not yet available. Therefore, it was decided that the establishment of a comprehensive spay and neuter program was the best solution.

An evaluation was made of the Low Cost Spay and Neuter Clinics in operation in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Marin County, Palo Alto and San Mateo. The clinics have clearly been successful. Municipal authorities approve of the clinics because they provide a definite approach to control the growth of the pet population. The general public has reacted favorably because the clinics generally charge a lower fee than private veterinarians for the operation.

Regulating authorities in Vancouver have implemented differential licensing of \$5.00 for a neutered dog and \$25.00 for an unneutered dog. This produces a strong incentive for owners to neuter their animals if the cost of the operation is reasonable (Table I). The low cost of the subsidized clinic, increases the impact of the license differential. These arguments persuaded the Executive Committee to decide, in the first quarter of 1975 to build a low cost Spay and Neuter Clinic. All municipalities in the greater Vancouver area, with two exceptions, indicated their desire to participate with a "Once in a Lifetime" capital grant for the building of a low cost Spay and Neuter Clinic. The total cost of the Clinic, including equipment, amounted to \$360,000. The land was donated by the British Columbia S. P.C.A. while the funds from the participating municipalities amounted to 52 percent of the total cost. The balance was made up by donations received from concerned citizens and associated groups.

TABLE I

Comparison of Cost of Surgical Sterilization in Private
and Publically Subsidized Clinics

	<u>Private Veterinary</u>	<u>Subsidized Clinic</u>
Dog Spay	\$55.00 - 80.00	\$30.00
Dog Castration	45.00	25.00
Cat Spay	50.00	25.00
Cat Castration	27.50	15.00
Vaccination	12.00	Included in spay/neuter

Despite delays the Clinic was officially opened by the Attorney-General of British Columbia on the 7th of August 1976. Operations commenced on the 9th of August 1976. In the first two or three weeks of operation the number of operations was restricted to 25 a day. This number was increased to 80 per day but has now stabilized at 60 per day. The initial staff consisted of two Veterinarians and four Veterinary Assistants but there are now five Veterinarians and a total of ten Veterinary Assistants. The Society accepts animals for spaying and neutering from members of the Society, donors to the Society, and residents of the participating municipalities. In addition, all dogs and cats leaving shelters must be neutered, vaccinated, and licensed. Dogs, but not cats, are also tattooed.

The results achieved during the period from the opening of the clinic on the 9th of August 1976 to the end of 1982 are illustrated by the following statistics. In 1976, the Vancouver Regional Branch destroyed a total of 80,000 animals. During the year of 1983, only 8,986 animals were destroyed. This reduction in animals killed also reduces, by 1.4 million pounds, the amount of pathological waste which has to be incinerated at a cost of 15¢. per pound. Therefore, incineration savings alone amounted to \$250,000. Further, during the years prior to 1976 the number of animals being destroyed was increasing at a rate of approximately 10% per year. If this increase had continued to 1982, the total number of animals destroyed would have been 141,000. Further, it must be indicated that the savings in incineration costs do not include the cost of holding animals in the shelters at approximately \$3.00 per day. Savings in holding costs amounted to nearly \$800,000 per year.

TABLE II

Growth/Decline of Surplus Pet Population
Without/With Low Cost Spay and Neuter Clinic

	WITH <u>Clinic</u> (Projected)	WITHOUT <u>Clinic</u> (Actual)
1976	80,000	Just opening
1977	88,000	64,400
1978	96,800	53,784
1979	106,480	21,000
1980	117,128	17,800
1981	128,840	15,300
1982	141,725	11,436
1983	115,897	8,986

The program produced additional good results. Animal related complaints have fallen by 42% since 1976 in the participating municipalities but by only 2% in the two non-participating municipalities. The number of impoundments by participating members was reduced by 7%, but increased by 27% in the non-participating municipalities. In 1976, the claim rate, the percentage of animals claimed to those impounded, was 40%. In 1982, those municipalities who participated in the Clinic showed had an average claim rate of 70%, and one municipality had a claim rate of 82%. In the two municipalities that did not join the Clinic, the claim rate increased from 40% to 51%. The higher claim rate helps to offset both the cost of animal control, and the costs of incineration. The compensation paid to owners of animals injured or killed by roving dogs has been reduced from \$14,000 in 1976 to \$84 in 1982. The number of licenses sold by municipalities has increased by an average of 53%. Dog bites have been reduced by 48%. Cruelty cases have been reduced by 54%. The number of dead or injured animals picked-up off the streets has been reduced by 80%.

In summary, the following conclusions can be drawn from the Vancouver experience. One must develop a comprehensive animal control program to reduce the cost of animal control. The large license fee differential is essential if a municipality or regulating authority wishes to control the growth of the pet population. High claim rates reduce the cost of animal control by decreasing man power needs and the cost of pathological waste disposal. Members of the public are prepared to have their animals spayed or neutered providing that the fee structure is perceived as be reasonable.