

Feeling Insecure?

Shelters turn to technology and training to take a bite out of crime

BY JIM BAKER

Animal shelters are supposed to be refuges for homeless and stray pets, places where people can come to retrieve a lost pet, or find a new best friend.

But anyone who's worked in the field long enough knows that shelters are also something else: targets.

It's almost routine to hear reports of shelters becoming the victims of crime. It seems that people will steal just about anything: cash, of course, but also animals, whether a cute kitten smuggled out underneath a winter coat, or a lost dog an obstinate owner would prefer to steal than pay to reclaim. They'll also raid the various drugs shelters keep on hand—controlled substances like the sedative Ketamine and painkillers, which are often sold illegally on the street. And plenty of other things get boosted, too: vans and trucks, computers from offices, bags of pet food. In other words, anything that isn't nailed down—and a few things that are, such as heating and air-conditioning equipment, sometimes targeted by thieves looking to sell the valuable copper components.

Security issues have been a longstanding problem for shelters, according to John Snyder, vice president for companion animals at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). "I experienced more than 60 break-ins during my career in sheltering, which ranged from people stealing their own dogs, to taking dogs they wanted but didn't want to sterilize, to even releasing all the animals," says Snyder, who worked as director of Alachua County Animal Services in Gainesville, Fla., from 1974 to 1998. Items taken from Snyder's shelter included money, an autoclave, a microscope, and a new animal control vehicle—which, Snyder says, the police found a few days later, stripped of its transmission and wheels. Many shelters are located in secluded or remote areas, he points out, which give cover to bad guys,



**p.s. Here's a way to
MAKE MORE MONEY
for your Shelter**

Profits for Shelters (**p.s.**) is a new retail program dedicated to helping animal shelters start a new retail section or boost the sales from their existing retail displays. You can make more money and put the profits back into saving pets!



“Without the incredible shelter prices PetEdge offers, we would never be able to save so many animals.”
—Shelli Skiadon, Humane Society of South Mississippi

**p.s. PetEdge
DEALER SERVICES**

Call us today to find out more...
(888) 230-1555
visit PetEdgeDS.com/ps
or email shelters@petedge.com

and it doesn't help that there's usually no one on the premises after 5 or 6 p.m.

With all their competing priorities, though, shelters rarely focus on security measures or staff training that might protect their organizations. "Since moving to the animal welfare field, I have never seen a class offered at a training seminar on this topic," says Mark Kumpf, director of the Montgomery County Animal Resource Center in Dayton, Ohio.

What's more, shelters—especially older ones—typically aren't designed with security in mind. Access to areas that should be controlled or restricted (and would be in another type of business) are often easily entered by anyone who can turn a doorknob. Alarms, lighting, vault safes, money drops, locking cash drawers, and other simple security measures are frequently absent.

This isn't to say that shelters should be like prisons, foreboding places that the public doesn't want to visit. That's exactly the image shelters are striving to get away from. But there are steps that they can take—and some cost very little—to increase their security, reducing the theft of pets and property, and making everyone feel safer, too.

Smile—You're on Candid Camera

Facilities around the country, tired of getting hit repeatedly by crime, are upgrading their security measures, adding new elements to the systems they've got, and looking for better ways to stay a step ahead of thieves and vandals.

"We literally just installed four security cameras and a DVR [digital video recorder], and I'm now downloading footage of the [people] who drove up and stole our recycle cans and an old file cabinet and washing machine," says Rea D. Cord, director of the Humane Society of Elmore County in Wetumpka, Ala. With this new system, which archives video for 28 days before recording over it, shelter staff can download footage shot when a crime took place, then view the stills frame by frame to identify the thieves or their vehicle. The cameras are pointed at major points of traffic and areas where suspicious behavior might occur: the front door, the parking lot, the office, and an outdoor drop box where people can leave animals at night. Cord can access

Enormous. Wonderful. Possibilities.



The
CENTER for
LOST PETS[™]
Using the Web to Find Lost Pets

Imagine if we all went to the same place when we lost or found a pet. Countless lost pets would be returned to the people who are missing them, freeing up space and resources in shelters for pets who need a good home.

The Center for Lost Pets can fundamentally change the way we look for our lost pets. But it can't happen without you.

Learn more @ www.TheCenterForLostPets.org



Made Possible By:
THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



the system remotely on the Internet, and monitor what's happening at the shelter. She estimates that the system cost \$1,500 to buy and install.

Cord feels pretty confident about the measures she's taken to protect the small amount of petty cash on hand, which comes from adoption fees and the shelter's thrift store. It's kept in a floor safe that's bolted down, and only three staff members know the combination. Euthanasia drugs are stored in another floor safe, accessible only to Cord and the lead euthanasia technician.

The main security challenge facing the shelter is the potential theft of animals; pit bulls and bulldog mixes seem to be common targets. "The folks who are gonna steal something, that's what they're gonna try to steal," Cord says. Staff keep a close eye on these dogs; they stay inside the shelter, secured in their kennels.

In an added twist, inmates from the county jail are brought to the shelter to do manual labor, such as cleaning kennels and doing laundry. Most have done a good job, but Cord worries that an inmate could spot a beautiful pit bull—or even a cute Yorkie puppy—and get word to a compatriot outside the jail, who could steal the pet. In cases where shelter staff suspect someone's behavior in particular, high-theft dogs are moved within the shelter, and locked up. "If we happen to have a particularly ill-tempered dog on hold," Cord says, "I would

love to have that dog moved to where the at-risk dog was—hoping the thief will enjoy the surprise!"

Sounding the Alarm

Along with video surveillance, many shelters have installed a variety of alarm systems. After several incidents of animal theft, vandalism, and break-ins, the Humane Society of Tacoma & Pierce County in Tacoma, Wash., moved to a new alarm system, made by a company called Sonitrol, that offered equipment to detect intrusion and fire, monitor access to the facility, and provide video surveillance.

Listening devices are planted throughout the shelter, with live feeds to a monitoring station, according to deputy director Denise McVicker. The system will pick up any loud noises at night, and will determine if the noise warrants tripping a silent alarm to notify the police. The audio devices are able to distinguish between unusual sounds like breaking glass

is watermarked, so that it's admissible as evidence in court, too.

McVicker estimates that it cost \$10,000 to install the new system, and the shelter pays a monthly monitoring fee of about \$200. The package proved its worth last year, when a man who wanted to steal a pit bull held a staff member at knifepoint. The man then fled with the dog through an exit, and a volunteer chased after him, and was also threatened. "Two cameras got very good shots of him," McVicker says. "The police came, viewed the video, and they knew him." The man was spotted, and arrested, about three weeks later.

All Keyed Up

Video cameras and sophisticated alarms are great security measures, but shelters can also accomplish a lot by paying attention to a facility's first line of defense: keys. They control who has access to the building,

The main security challenge facing the shelter is the potential theft of animals; pit bulls and bulldog mixes seem to be common targets. Staff keep a close eye on these dogs; they stay inside the shelter, secured in their kennels.

and routine ones, such as a dog barking or the rattling of a cage door. (There are no sensors in the main kennel area, to cut down on false alarms.) Contacts wired on the shelter's doors and windows ensure that if someone tries to force entrance into the building, he will trip the alarm. There are also motion detectors in the shelter's office, where no one should have access after hours. And there are four panic buttons that staff can press in case of a threatening situation, which triggers the silent alarm, bringing law enforcement.

Before moving to the new system, the shelter had an off-the-shelf video surveillance system with four cameras to monitor the inside and outside of the building. But the shelter wanted to upgrade its quality and capability. So the Sonitrol system was installed, with eight additional cameras, and everything was integrated. Video footage shot by the cameras and digitally recorded

high-risk areas within the shelter (such as the office or veterinary clinic), and the animals themselves.

It's often a challenge to keep track of who has the keys to which doors, cages, and gates—and staff turnover at shelters increases the risk that some keys may go missing when people leave their jobs. It's a common—and commonsense—practice at many shelters to give master keys that open doors and locks throughout the building only to a limited number of staff. All staff members who have opening and closing privileges receive perimeter keys; other employees get keys that give them access only to their assigned areas.

That's the system used at Wayside Waifs, a 33,000-square-foot shelter in Kansas City, Mo., that has about 60 staff and 900 active volunteers. There's a process for retrieving keys when staff turnover

occurs. When staff are issued keys, they sign a commitment stating that they've received them, and will return them when they leave their employment, just as they're expected to do with their identification badges. New staff are also given their own individual codes to use to deactivate the alarm system. When they no longer work at the shelter, their codes are deleted from the system, according to Danny Carmichael, director of facilities. Many shelters use this combination of both keys and alarm codes for staff.

Doing periodic key inventories is a good idea, but sometimes keys still go missing. Cord, from the Alabama shelter, knows how to solve that problem. She has had the facility's locks rekeyed on occasion, just to be safe. A locksmith did the job in a couple of hours, and staff turned in their old keys, and received new ones.

Shelters take different approaches to locking cages, kennel runs, and guillotine doors in order to prevent theft of pets. Carolyn Machowski, manager of shelter services at The HSUS, recommends one

Keep track of your keys. For safety's sake, a lockbox containing a copy of the master key should be placed in a location that only the shelter's director, police officers, and the fire department know about.

standard operating procedure for securing individual animals. Kennels and cages should require the same keys so that only one is needed to open them, making it faster to lock and unlock them all at once. Staff assigned to that particular area should have the master key. The cages and kennels should be locked during the day, but left open at night in case there's

a fire and emergency workers need to evacuate the animals. For safety's sake, a lockbox containing a copy of the master key should be placed in a location that only the shelter's director, police officers, and the fire department know about.

Some shelters have moved from using keys to a computerized system of keycards and magnetic card readers. Wayside Waifs currently uses a combination of keys and keycards, according to Carmichael. He recommends that if a shelter is starting fresh, with a new or renovated facility, it's a good idea to go ahead and invest in a keycard system. Down the road, that makes it much simpler when changes have to be made regarding who has access to the building. Magnetic card readers aren't currently part of the system at McVicker's shelter, but that's an option. "The system ... has the ability to have keycard entry sites, and record those bits of information, and lock out at certain times of the day," she says.

Eyes Wide Open

Among all these technical solutions, what about the human component of security? Staff and volunteers can help prevent crimes, too; the best technology and written procedures in the world are no good if people don't use them. If staff lose or duplicate their keys, give out their alarm codes, or open doors to visitors they don't know, it's the same as having no security at all.

Shelters sometimes just lack a security mindset, according to Machowski. "Because of the fast pace of the environment, they get wrapped up in day-to-day activities of keeping the shelter running, caring for the animals, and servicing the public. ... Security doesn't become a priority until there's an incident," she says. So doors are left propped open, visitors wander the building unescorted, and gates to the loading area aren't locked when the animal control truck leaves.

"I think building a culture of awareness is as important as anything," says Brad Shear, executive director of the Mohawk and Hudson River Humane Society in Menands, N.Y., near Albany. For that reason, staff and volunteers at his shelter are told to say something if they see a person acting suspiciously or in an area they shouldn't be. "It's OK to ask somebody,



'Hey, what are you doing? I don't know who you are,'" he says.

McVicker agrees: "You never know who's going to come through your door, so the staff just needs to be diligent and thoughtful, and not just assume everybody who comes here has good intentions. So we try to keep it in our employees' minds that they need to pay attention to their surroundings" and to shelter visitors.

At Wayside Waifs, everyone on staff wears an ID badge with their name, photo, and department. Community service workers, who are at the shelter through probation programs, wear orange traffic vests to distinguish themselves. "If someone sees an orange vest traveling somewhere they're not supposed to be, they can approach them and say, 'Can I help you?'" Carmichael says.

In an era of widespread budget cuts, finding the funds to create a secure environment in a shelter is more challenging than ever. But as long as people take things that don't belong to them—whether that's cold hard cash, or warm fuzzy puppies—the need to plan for potential security threats won't go away. Having money to invest in technology helps, but it doesn't drain your budget to train staff and volunteers to be alert, follow procedures, and make the most of what you've got. It comes down to doing what you can, and staying vigilant.

You help animals. We help you.

Busting the Bad Guys—on a Budget

Fighting crime doesn't have to be expensive. There are many simple steps that shelters can take to improve their security without breaking the bank. Shelter experts offer a range of commonsense measures and quick fixes that can help prevent theft, break-ins, and other unwanted incidents.

- Create a standard operating procedure for opening and closing the shelter, which includes entering and exiting the building after hours.
- Enlist a security expert/police officer to discuss your facility's weak points and how to strengthen them. Discuss cash-handling procedures and concerns such as animal and drug theft.
- Repair gates and fencing to ensure they are impenetrable when closed and locked. Keep side and back doors closed and locked.
- Remove the high growth of shrubs and weeds and trim foliage that blocks visibility around the building's exterior.
- Review the controls and operations of your exterior lights. Document the specifications, and create a routine maintenance program.
- Maintain a master list of key assignments, and make sure that staff acknowledge receipt of keys.
- Contact the local police department, and request that a patrol unit regularly pass by the shelter, keeping a close eye out for suspicious activity or trespassers.
- Post prominent signs indicating that the shelter has video surveillance and is monitored and secured 24/7. 

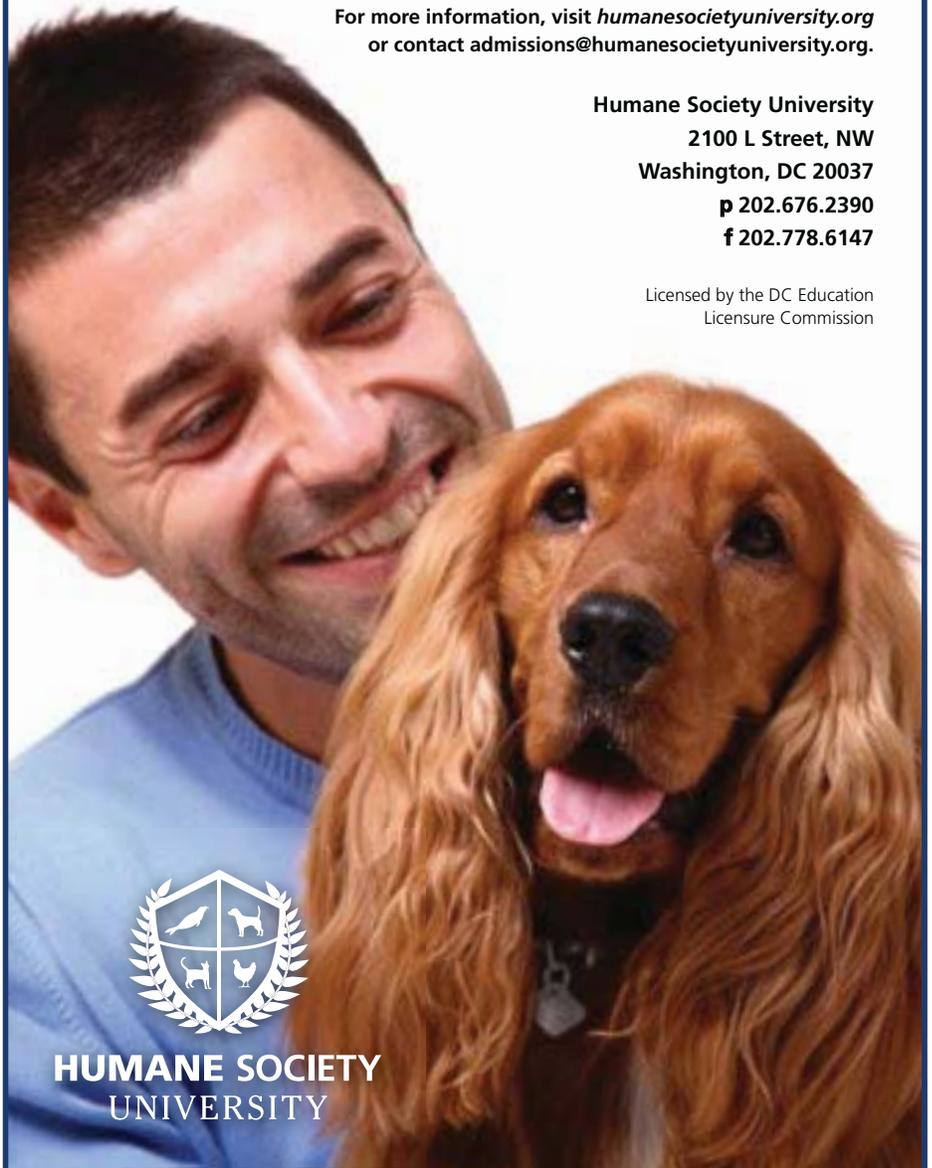
For more information on improving your shelter's security, or advice on other sheltering issues, send inquiries to asi@humanesociety.org.

Humane Society University provides an academic curriculum exclusively dedicated to human-animal studies. Undergraduate degrees and graduate certificates can be completed online or with a combination of online and onsite classes. We also offer a variety of professional development courses on topics such as animals in disaster, animal fighting investigations, mastering animal sheltering basics, and confronting compassion fatigue.

For more information, visit humanesocietyuniversity.org or contact admissions@humanesocietyuniversity.org.

Humane Society University
2100 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
p 202.676.2390
f 202.778.6147

Licensed by the DC Education
Licensure Commission



**HUMANE SOCIETY
UNIVERSITY**

Learn. Lead. Achieve.

Humane Society University is committed to providing equal access to educational opportunities for all applicants regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, marital, or veteran status in compliance with Federal and state laws and regulations. All benefits, privileges, and opportunities offered by Humane Society University are available to all students and employees in accordance with federal and District of Columbia laws and regulations. This policy is applicable to all personnel policies and practices including recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, compensation, transfers, layoffs, terminations, benefits, and social and recreational programs.