

# **Guidelines for Rescue Volunteers**

## **Assisting with Domestic Rabbit Confiscations**

### **Prepare Your Self**

- Patience is necessary for you to be helpful and effective in this situation.
- You must be able to see horrible injuries, disgusting situations, dead animals, and remain calm.
- Consider any health conditions that may make this situation physically difficult for you. The area may be filthy and cluttered. Rabbits may be in hard-to-reach places, under structures, in tunnels, and may be cage-aggressive. Consider your ability to crawl or crouch if the situation needs you to do so.
- Think about your personal needs and how many hours you can give onsite. Are you able to return on a second day, if needed?
- Know your strengths as a volunteer and communicate them to your Point-of-Contact. Perhaps your skills are best used offsite.\*

### **Onsite Communication**

- One person should coordinate the work of the volunteers and serve as a liason with other agencies onsite. This is your Point-of-Contact.
- Have a tactical conversation with your Point-of-Contact when you arrive onsite. Learn the goal for the day and what is your role.
- Wait to be told by your Point-of-Contact what to do. Do NOT do your own thing, even if you think you know what's best.
- Remember that the animals are someone's property. If the owner is present, treat that person respectfully.

**Do NOT tell friends, talk to the media, nor post comments or pictures on social websites. The owner has legal rights and should not be subject to slander. Sharing information could compromise the legal case!**

### **Assisting offsite**

\* You may want to help but being onsite is not needed or is not a good fit for you. That's ok! There are many ways to assist after the rabbits have been moved to safety. Here are some ideas:

- ◆ **Transport:** Rabbits may need to be driven to and from veterinary appointments, or from the temporary shelter to foster homes.
- ◆ **Coordinate supplies:** Hay pick-up and delivery, collecting donated food and medical goods.
- ◆ **"The books":** Record all expenses related to the care and maintenance of the rabbits while in foster care. Accurate detail is necessary in the event the owner is ordered to pay restitution.

### **Prepare Your Stuff** (clip this pocket card)

- **Clothing:** Bring layers. The area may be cold, hot, wet, dirty.
- **Thick gloves** (to protect against poking wires and/or nipping, scratching rabbits)
- **Disposable medical gloves**
- **Surgical face mask** (to reduce odors and exposure to airborne allergens)
- **Camera**
- **Notebook, permanent markers, pens**
- **Index cards**
- **Ruler and coins** (dime, quarter, penny)
- **Carriers and cages**
- **Nesting materials** for any nursing moms
- **Additionally, ask your Point-of-Contact** what other medical supplies or tools may be needed.

### **Onsite Documentation**

- Remember that the animals are evidence.
- Everything must be documented the day of seizure for prosecutors to build a case.
- Every rabbit must be itemized, including:
  - ◆ An identification number
  - ◆ Sex and natural markings
  - ◆ Exact weight
  - ◆ General health status
  - ◆ Photo/s of the rabbit, including any injuries (use a coin next to any wound as a size reference)
  - ◆ Photo/s of living conditions, including size of enclosure, substrate, exposure to weather, access to fresh food and water (use a ruler in the photos as a size marker)
- A qualified veterinarian must make any medical diagnoses. The Heineke Equine Body Score adapted to rabbits is a helpful tool.

### **Caring... and Waiting... and Caring**

- **Expect post-rescue death.** Some rabbits may have experienced horrific stress and injuries.
- **Expect post-rescue births.** If males and females were not separated onsite or if females were artificially inseminated, there is a strong chance that rescue numbers will increase in temporary shelter or foster care. Females should be palpated every 1-2 days to assess for pregnancy.
- **Additional medical needs** can arise at any time. Volunteer help is needed long after the "thrill" of the rescue.
- **Keep careful record** of all expenses for foster rabbits.
- **Have patience.** The process of charging someone with animal cruelty or neglect is long, and resolution can be months away.
- **Prepare to be disappointed.** Courts may allow the rabbits to return to their owner and/or courts may not prevent the owner from getting more animals in the future.