

Animal Welfare

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

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Pet microchip law one step closer in county

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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County animal shelter officials took the first step toward making identifying microchips the rule for all dogs and cats in unincorporated areas of the county.

The county Animal Shelter board voted 5-1 on Monday to make microchips mandatory in pets 4 months and older, mainly to cut down on the number of animals who end up lost without a way to return home.

Board member Jeff Marsh voted against the ordinance because he didn't like the term mandatory.

"I am thrilled that Santa Cruz County is moving in a very proactive direction to help shelter employees reunite lost pets with their owners," shelter General Manager Melanie Sobel said about the vote. "This measure will move more animals out of the shelter more quickly, creating precious space for more needy animals, and will help



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter General Manager Melanie Sobel looks in on a dog turned into the shelter with no microchip or other identification that would help shelter staff reunite the dog with his owner.

reduce shelter crowding and the shelter's euthanasia rate."

The ordinance will go before the Board of Supervisors early next year.

Each city in the county also will have a chance to vote on whether to enact the law in separate public hearings held in each jurisdiction.

Though the proposal was met with community opposition, Sobel said she consid-

ers the microchip a crucial tool in reuniting pets with their rightful owners.

Sobel calls the microchip, about the size of a grain of rice that gets injected like a shot between an animal's shoulder blades without anesthesia, a "sure fire" way to increase the number of lost animals who get returned home.

Too often collars and tags can fall off or become worn

so as to erase an owner's identity, she said.

About 52 percent of lost dogs with a chip go back home and 38.5 percent of lost cats with a chip return home, Sobel said.

Of the nearly 6,000 animals who land at the county shelter each year, roughly 20 percent are put down.

Critics attacked the proposal for alleged health risks for animals posed by the chips, cost and being a move by government to intrude on the rights of individuals.

Some pet owners said the microchip proposal is overreaching and could prompt some pet owners to not claim their lost animals for fear of being penalized.

The Santa Cruz County SPCA has offered free microchips beginning in January to help pet owners comply with the planned ordinance.

Pets with permanent tattoo identifications can be exempt from the chips.

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