

New legislation is good news for pets

Animals Shelters
By ANNA MARIA BASQUEZ

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Recently abandoned and lost pets will be spared a lethal injection, at least for a short time, with Gov. Pete Wilson's recent signing of a package of pet-related bills.

Wilson earlier this week signed a package of three pet bills he says are meant to protect man's furry friends.

"Encouraging adoption instead of euthanasia for thousands of stray animals and reuniting pets with their rightful owners is a commendable goal," Wilson said in a statement. "Also, by requiring shelters to modify their hours of operation to accommodate working families searching for their pets, it increases the chance that they will be able to locate them."

One bill will extend the mandatory holding period for stray animals from 72 hours to between four and six business days.

For shelters that remain open until 7 p.m., or that are open one weekend day, the holding requirement will be four days.

Local animal-shelter officials welcomed the new laws, but questioned where the money will come from to implement the legislation.

"It's great that statewide there'll be a higher standard for all shelters," said Karla Koebernick, director of community relations for the Santa Cruz Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "Many of the things required in the bill were things the SPCA was already doing. The additional things required may mean we'll need more resources from the community to make them happen."

She cited the need for more kennel space to make it work. The SPCA currently holds animals 72 hours.

The extended holding period under Senate Bill 1785, sponsored by Sen. Tom Hay-

den, D-Santa Monica, will go into effect Jan. 1.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2000, shelters will no longer be able to use carbon monoxide for euthanasia. Shelters will instead be required to use lethal injection. That legislation was sponsored by Sen. Quentin Kopp, I-South San Francisco.

"Although our goal is to reduce the number of animals that must be put down by reunification and adoption, this bill can help reduce their suffering if the ultimate decision must be made," Wilson said in a statement.

However, Bill Meade, vice president of Humane Animal Care Services in Watsonville, cautioned that killing animals strictly by lethal injection may cause other problems, especially for wilder animals.

"When you have these blanket bans is when it might do some harm as well as some good," Meade said.

Carbon monoxide is sometimes used by shelters as a backup way to kill unwanted or problem animals, he said.

For example, Meade said, several years ago his shelter had to euthanize several mice found inside a truck. He said injection for each one would have been near impossible.

"Without having control poles, cats totally panic and start thrashing all around," Meade said. "With certain wild animals that are difficult to handle, the purified carbon monoxide gas is a good backup method. Some legislation causes mistakes because (legislators) don't understand some of these procedures."

Meade said the requirement that animals be kept longer won't affect his shelter because they already animals up to several weeks.

"We're trying to keep the euthanasia as close to zero as possible, so we find their homes," he said.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Bill Meade of Humane Animal Care Services in Watsonville holds up a recent stray. A new state law says shelters must hold animals for at least four days before they are euthanized.

"I've always said to people if they have a tag on an animal, it's the best life insurance they can have," Meade said.

Wilson also signed Assembly Bill 1856, sponsored by Assemblyman Edward Vin-

cent, D-Inglewood, which will require public animal-control agencies or shelters in cities with populations of more than 100,000 to spay or neuter all dogs and cats before they are given away.