

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES DIVISION OF ANIMAL HEALTH SHELTER / RESCUE POLICY STATEMENT ON ANIMAL HOSPITALS ACTING AS ISOLATION FACILITIES

October 27, 2009

The Department on occasion receives requests to inspect and approve animal hospitals to act as isolation facilities for shelter or rescue organizations. Despite beliefs that an animal hospital would be the most appropriate location for an animal at risk of getting sick, isolating imported animals at a facility established for the purpose of receiving and treating sick animals from the community amounts to an increased possibility of exposure, for both hospital clients' animals and those brought in by the shelter or rescue.

The 48-hour isolation period for imported shelter or rescue animals is a critical step in safeguarding against the risk of transmission of infectious or contagious disease between domestic animals. Although 48 hours is not a sufficient time to allow all incubating diseases to manifest in clinical signs, it is frequently enough time for an animal with a preexisting illness that appeared healthy at the time of departure to exhibit signs as a result of an overtaxed immune system associated with the stresses of shipment. Locations approved by the Department to serve as isolation facilities for shelters or rescues are required to be constructed in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of cross contamination between imported animals and those already residing in the Commonwealth.

The Department has established the following policy to ensure animal hospitals acting as isolation facilities for shelters and rescues meet the standards necessary to adequately address this increased risk of transmission.

In addition to the requirements expressed in Emergency Order 1-AHO-05, any animal hospital, animal clinic, veterinarian's office or other facility established for the purpose of attending to or treating illness in domestic animals requesting approval to act as an isolation facility for imported shelter or rescue animals must meet the following conditions:

1. The building must have an alternate entrance. The entrance must be separate from the one used by regular hospital patients that can be dedicated to shelter/rescue animals entering the building.
2. The alternate entrance must have direct access to the room used for the 48-hour isolation.
3. There shall be no spaces shared between regular hospital patients and shelter/rescue animals. Shared spaces would include, but not be limited to doorways, hallways, examination rooms, boarding rooms, grooming rooms or isolation rooms.

Animal hospitals meeting the above criteria may be approved as isolation facilities for shelter or rescue organizations importing animals from other states upon inspection by the Department.