

No Kill Equation - Proactive Redemptions (a “keep them out” element).

Proactive redemptions is another name for return to owner programs which are designed to get animals back home if they escape or get lost. For municipal shelters, animal control is part of daily functioning and what the public expects. There is a balance to be kept between keeping the public safe and caring for animals. This means that animal control officers respond to a lot of calls about dogs running at large or about free roaming cats. When it comes to dogs and cats believed to belong to someone, the goal of proactive redemptions is to work to avoid taking them to the shelter in the first place and to keep them back where they belong: home. A vast majority of the animals which end up in shelters and are later destroyed are actually beloved family pets. These animals should not be destroyed simply because they lack the ability to speak.

In many no kill communities, proactive redemptions boils down to actions taken by Animal Control Officers “in the field.” These steps include things like scanning animals for microchips, checking for rabies tags or identification tags, checking on a lost pet web site like Pet Harbor and making limited inquiries of businesses and homes in the area where animals were picked up. Mitch Schneider is a former Washoe County Animal Control Director in Reno, Nevada says, “it starts in the field. In order to reduce the intake of these animals, something that benefits everyone, officers make every reasonable effort (check for ID, scan for a microchip, talk to area residents, etc.) to return animals to their rightful owners rather than impounding them at our facility. We are very busy in the field. However, while it might be more work initially to try to find where these animals live for the officers in the field, it is less work for staff back at the shelter. It evens out in the end. It means less animals entering the shelter and more animals going home alive. It is a win-win outcome.”

Another component of this element of the no kill equation is ensuring pets can be identified. This is where the public comes in and the solution is simple: microchipping. A small chip, about the size of a grain of rice, is injected by a veterinarian under the skin at animal's neck, at the base of the spine. The chip contains a unique number, much like a bar-code, which can be scanned to determine who the animal belongs to. Although many people may think microchipping isn't necessary because their pets live inside or are never unsupervised, think back to how many pets were lost after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and after the April 2011 storms in the South. Thousands of animals were displaced from their homes and there was simply no way to identify who owned them. Microchipping can also increase the odds of having your pet returned to you if he or she is stolen and ends up in the hands of law enforcement officials or at a shelter. In some no kill communities, the proactive redemptions element of the equation is advanced through Chip-A-Thon events. The shelter offers an at-cost chipping event once a month so that people can have pets chipped quickly and for a very low cost.