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Avoid Heartache: Humane Society of Berks County Reminds Pet Owners to Properly Identify Pets and License Dogs

The Humane Society of Berks County, Berks County's leader in animal welfare, reminds pet owners of their responsibility to properly identify pets in Pennsylvania. Several recent cases involving the legal adoption of unidentified and unlicensed pets have led officials from the Humane Society of Berks County to issue an urgent reminder to pet owners that they are responsible for providing proper identification for their pets.

Under Pennsylvania law, all dogs require a dog license issued through the county in which the dog's owner lives. Stray dogs with displayed licenses are required to be held in animal shelter for ten days prior to adoption or euthanasia. Unlicensed dogs are only required to be held for 48 hours. Under State law there are **no minimum holding periods** for cats and other animals, although the HSBC hold all stray animals for 48 hours. "Owners need to realize that their pet could be adopted, or worse, put to sleep, in any shelter in the State within *two days or less* if not properly licensed or identified," said Humane Society executive director, Karel I. Minor. "Owners who do not take their responsibility seriously, both ethically and under the law, face the tragic loss of their pet."

The 48 hour hold law applies only to dogs. All other domestic animals may be adopted or euthanized immediately. The Humane Society of Berks County houses nearly 7,000 animals a year, half of which are strays. Given the lack of space at animal shelters, many of these animals face euthanasia and many are adopted to new families. One Berks County case highlighted the dangers of not providing proper identification for pets. A stray cat was brought to the HSBC's Reading shelter by a Good Samaritan. The cat had no identification or microchip and no lost report was filed with the HSBC during the holding period. After the 48 hour holding period expired, the cat was adopted by a loving new family.

“The HSBC found the cat a great new home, only to have the original owner come forward after the adoption,” said Minor. Under State law, the cat had legally transferred ownership. Fortunately, the adoptive owner agreed to return the cat to his original owner. That is not always the case and the new owner is under no obligation to return a legally adopted stray pet. If the pet has proper identification, a license, an implanted microchip, or if the owner filed a lost report either in person or via the HSBC’s website, the pet can be returned to the original owner promptly. If not, the outcome can be very different. “The new owner loves the new pet and the old owner, who didn’t provide the pet with a license or identification, doesn’t have his or her pet. It’s a tragic situation, said Minor. “People forget that it is *their* responsibility to keep their pet safe and secure. Waiting days or weeks to report a lost pet is just not good enough.”

Of the 6,939 animals housed by the HSBC in the past year, 3,626 were strays. Less than 4% of stray cats and 50% of stray dogs were returned to their owners. “What’s the difference?” asked Minor. “Dogs are more likely than cats to have identification. Virtually 100% of animals with proper identification are swiftly reconnected their owner.” Animals without identification can face long stays at animal shelters, adoption by new families, or euthanasia due to overcrowding in shelters.

“No one wins in this situation,” said Minor. “Not the new owner who loves the new pet, not the original owner who loves the pet, and not the HSBC who provided a safe haven for a lost pet, followed the law, and now has to help both parties deal with the aftermath.” The Humane Society of Berks County provides dog licenses, pet identification, and low-cost microchip implantation services to the public.

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities, sheltering nearly 7,000 animals each year. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society offers adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society of Berks County is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading. More information is available at www.berkshumane.org.

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