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## Position Statement on Mandatory Spay-Neuter

The American College of Theriogenologists and The Society for Theriogenology believe that companion animals not intended for breeding should be spayed or neutered; however, both organizations believe that the decision to spay or neuter a pet must be made on a case by case basis, and this decision should be made between the pet's owner and its veterinarian, taking into consideration the pet's age, breed, sex, health status, intended use, household environment and temperament.

While there are health benefits to spaying and neutering these must be weighed against the health benefits of the sex steroids. In general, the advantages of spaying or neutering a pet include effective population control, decreased aggression, decreased wandering, decreased risk of being hit by a car, and decreased risk of mammary, testicular and ovarian cancer. On the other hand, the disadvantages of spaying or neutering may include increased risk of obesity, diabetes, osteosarcoma, hemangiosarcoma, prostatic adenocarcinoma, transitional cell carcinoma, urinary tract infections, urinary incontinence, autoimmune thyroiditis, hypothyroidism and hip dysplasia. Therefore, the decision to spay or neuter a dog or cat should be made solely by the pet's owner with the direct input of their veterinarian and will be dependent on each particular animal's situation.

Additionally, research has shown that in locations where mandatory spay and neuter programs have been instituted, a decrease in the number of vaccinated and licensed animals has been seen due to poor program compliance from pet owners' fears of seeking veterinary care if their animals are still intact. This may result in decreased preventive care and regular wellness examinations which may then diminish the pet's quality of life because of increasing undiagnosed health issues. It also may result in an increase in zoonotic diseases, such as hookworm and roundworm infection in children due to poor deworming programs, and decreased compliance with routine rabies vaccination.

The ACT and SFT make the following recommendations to continue moving toward effective methods of reducing the number

of abandoned, unwanted and euthanized dogs and cats in the US and other countries where similar problems exist.

- 1) Provide increased jurisdictional control to the AVMA Governmental Relations division, Animal Welfare Committee, and the APHIS-Animal Care division.
- 2) Ensure suppliers to pet stores are providing adequate care for breeding stock and offspring.
- 3) Support programs to expand the public awareness of pet overpopulation, acceptable breeding standards, and responsibilities of pet ownership. Provide the public a means to access assistance with concerns of pet health, ownership, behavior and management issues.
- 4) Work with state and local rescue and humane societies to assemble accurate data on causes for relinquishment of dogs and cats to enable these organizations, federal and local governments, and veterinary organizations to address the fundamental causes of abandonment.
- 5) Provide low cost spay/neuter facilities for economically disadvantaged persons and communities.
- 6) Continue to work on reduction of feral cat populations.
- 7) Establish programs to ensure access of breeders to proper reproductive care and counseling.
- 8) Provide local or federal governmental assistance to registered rescue organizations to facilitate placement of unwanted pets.

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