

Guidelines for euthanasia of domestic animals by firearms

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Abstract

All animals that are to be killed, whether for food, for humane reasons, or because they are homeless, must receive a quick and painless death. In some smaller communities, veterinary or humane society expertise may not be readily available to humanely kill stray and unwanted animals. An alternative that provides for a humane death for the animal is by shooting. The following guidelines are intended to assist persons who must perform this usually distasteful task; they contain recommended techniques that will help to ensure that any animals killed by shooting will die in a humane way.

Résumé

Recommandations pour l'euthanasie des animaux domestiques par armes à feu

Tout animal que l'on doit euthanasier, que ce soit parce qu'il est abandonné, pour des humanitaires ou pour la reproduction alimentaire, mérite de recevoir une mort rapide et sans douleur.

L'élimination adéquate des animaux errants ou abandonnés dans les petites agglomérations urbaines constitue un problème particulier. Généralement, on devrait avoir recours à cette fin aux services d'un médecin vétérinaire ou du personnel expérimenté d'une société d'une société humanitaire de protection des animaux. Toutefois, à certains endroits, particulièrement en régions éloignées, ces ressources peuvent ne pas être disponibles tout comme le matériel, les connaissances ou l'expérience nécessaires pour euthanasier de façon humanitaires ces animaux.

Lorsque les services d'un médecin vétérinaire ou d'une société de protection des animaux ne sont pas disponibles, le Comité sur le bien-être animal de l'Association canadienne des vétérinaires considère que la meilleure alternative pour offrir une mort décente à l'animal réside dans l'utilisation d'une arme à feu.

Les recommandations qui suivent sont destinées à guider les personnes qui auraient à accomplir cette

tâche déplaisante mais nécessaire. Elles contiennent la description de techniques qui assureront à l'animal une mort rapide et humanitaire.

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Introduction

All animals that are to be killed, whether for food, for humane reasons, or because they are homeless, must receive a quick and painless death. The proper disposal of stray and unwanted animals in small communities is one area of specific concern. Whenever possible, veterinary or experienced humane society personnel should be utilized to humanely kill stray or unwanted animals. However, in some smaller communities, the materials, knowledge, and expertise necessary to humanely kill stray and unwanted animals may not be readily available.

If obtaining the services of a veterinarian or a humane society to perform euthanasia is not possible, it is the view of the CVMA Animal Welfare Committee that the best alternative that provides for a humane death for the animal is by shooting. The following brief guidelines are intended to assist persons who must perform this task; they contain recommended techniques that will help to ensure that any animals killed by shooting will die in a humane way.

The initial impetus for the preparation of this article was the concern that stray and unwanted animals in smaller rural areas were often killed inhumanely, in the absence of expertise from a veterinarian or a humane society. To provide a set of simple guidelines on humanely shooting animals, for the police or for anyone else who might be placed in a situation where an animal needed to be killed, these guidelines were developed. It is the intention of the Animal Welfare Committee to produce this information as a small brochure or pamphlet for circulation to policing agencies, humane societies, and other interested people.

General considerations

For an animal to receive a humane death, it should be rendered unconscious as rapidly as possible. Therefore most recommended methods of euthanasia involve agents that affect the brain very rapidly.

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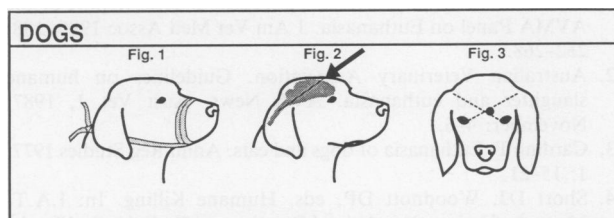
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Dr. J. Al Longair, Chairman, Animal Welfare Committee, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, 339 Booth Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7K1

Shooting, although esthetically unpleasant, is a humane method of killing provided that the shot penetrates the brain. To ensure that this occurs, the weapon used must be fired with the muzzle placed close to the animal's head, pointing in the required direction. The animal should be adequately restrained to ensure proper placement of the shot. Each animal species has a slightly different brain positioning within the skull, therefore knowledge of these differences is essential.

Shooting an animal should only be done by persons well versed in handling firearms and licensed to use firearms, and only in jurisdictions that allow for firearm use. Ideally, local policing agencies should be involved. Safety to personnel and the general public must be considered. The procedure should be performed outdoors in a location away from public access. If police officers using their firearms are not available, the firearms that can be used for humanely shooting an animal from close range would be either a .22 caliber rifle with long-rifle mushroom shells or a .410 gauge shotgun with slugs or pellets. In most cases, the barrel of the firearm should be 3–5 cm from the head if using a rifle, pistol or .410 gauge shotgun, or 1–2 m if using a larger gauge shotgun or rifle (e.g. a .308 rifle).

To facilitate the humane shooting of an animal, familiarity with handling animals is necessary. The animal should be treated with a calm and reassuring manner to reduce any anxiety that the animal may have. An animal that becomes tense or excited will be more difficult to restrain and to kill humanely. In some cases it may be advisable to sedate the animal before killing it. In some cases the shot may pass right through the animal's head, thus direction of shooting must be considered. It must be noted that although an animal shot correctly is instantly unconscious, there may be convulsive thrashing and muscle spasms for some seconds after the shot.

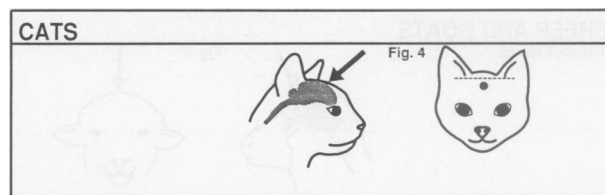


Guidelines for shooting domestic animal species

Dogs

Dogs should always be handled and spoken to in a kind and calm manner. It may be necessary in some cases to muzzle unpredictable, nervous or injured animals. Muzzling is easily done by taking a long piece of soft cord (or gauze, soft fabric or panty hose) and making a loop in the middle. The loop is slipped over the dog's muzzle and gently but firmly tightened with a single half-hitch knot on top. The ends of the cord are then passed around under the chin, crossed over and tied behind the ears (Figure 1).

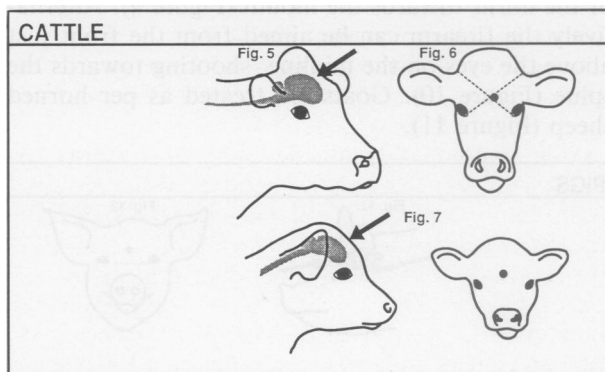
Once the dog has relaxed, it can be taken outside, the leash secured to a solid object, and the dog offered



some food. It may be convenient to place the food on a small stool or chair. The firearm is then aimed at a point midway between the level of the eyes and the base of the ears, but slightly off to one side so as to miss the bony ridge that runs down the middle of the skull (Figures 2 and 3). The aim should be slightly across the dog and towards the spine. In some cases the shot may pass right through the animal's head, thus direction of shooting must be considered.

Cats

Members of the cat family may be very difficult to shoot humanely. It may be preferable to sedate these animals (medication can be added to their food, for example) prior to shooting them. It is recommended that the animal be placed into a canvas bag or thick blanket with only the head out. The firearm is then aimed at the center of the cat's head slightly below a line drawn midway between the ears (Figure 4). When proper technique has been used the animal will become unconscious immediately, but convulsive activity and bleeding may persist for a short period of time. In some cases the shot may pass right through the animal's head, thus direction of shooting must be considered.



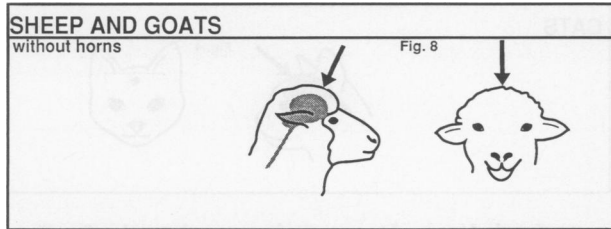
Cattle

Mature Cattle

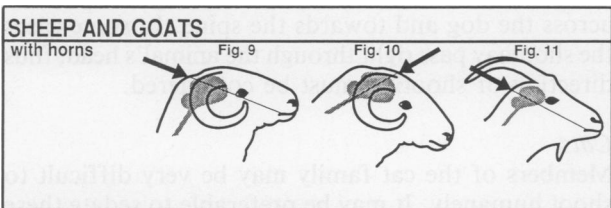
The head should be secured in a chute or by halter and shank to a solid structure. Food can be placed in front of the animal. The firearm is held at right angles to the slope of the front of the skull and aimed at a point 2/3 of the way up on the forehead at a point intersecting imaginary lines drawn between the back of the ears and the corners of the eyes (Figures 5 and 6). It may be easier to shoot slightly to the side of the ridge that runs down the centre of the face.

Calves

Calves can be handled in the same manner as mature cattle but the aim of the firearm should be squarely on the midline of the forehead slightly lower than in mature cattle (Figure 7).



and food offered to the animal. The aim of the firearm should be from behind or from the top of the head at a point high up on the head an equal distance from the eyes and ears (Figure 8).



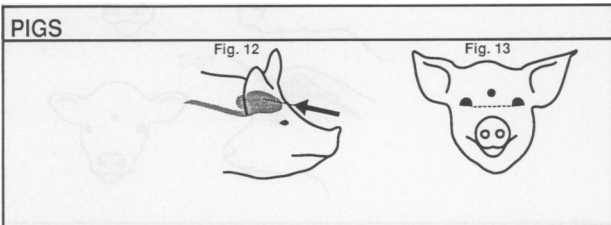
Sheep and goats

Sheep and goats without horns

Sheep and goats can be handled in the same manner as cattle — the head should be secured with a halter, and food offered to the animal. The aim of the firearm should be from behind or from the top of the head at a point high up on the head an equal distance from the eyes and ears (Figure 8).

Sheep and goats with horns

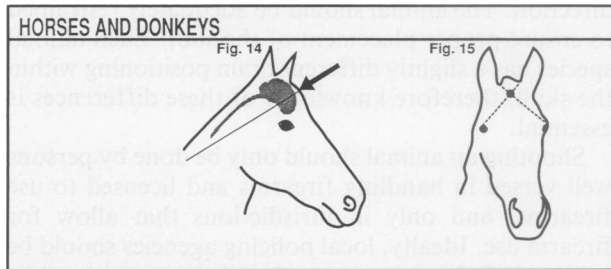
If the animals have horns, the approach should be from the rear and the aim directed between the base of the horns towards the mouth (Figure 9). Alternatively the firearm can be aimed from the front just above the eyes on the midline, shooting towards the spine (Figure 10). Goats are treated as per horned sheep (Figure 11).



Swine

Mature swine are hard to handle and can be very dangerous if aroused. A large bowl of feed placed before

the animal may help to distract the animal. The bullet should enter the skull at a point 2 cm above an imaginary line drawn between the eyes (Figures 12 and 13). The aim should be well up into the skull.



Horses, mules and donkeys

These animals should be haltered to control the head, and led to the desired location. Food can be placed on the ground and the animal allowed to eat. In these species, it is essential to aim the shot above the eyes as the brain is high in the upper part of the skull. The bullet should enter the skull at a point where an imaginary line crosses from the eyes to the ears (Figures 14 and 15). The direction of the shot should be down towards the withers.

Acknowledgments

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