

Housing Market Affects Dogs, Other Pets

Homeowners forced into foreclosure may leave their dogs behind when moving.

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The growing number of home foreclosures across the country also impacts homeowners' cats and dogs, KCAL9 News of Los Angeles reports. Forced to move out of their homes, some pet owners leave their animals behind, a practice discouraged by animal control officials.

"Now that the trend is foreclosures, there are animals that are just left out there abandoned," said Pete Alarcon, an animal control officer in Sacramento, Calif. Alarcon said that he and other animal control officers receive calls from neighbors and realtors concerned about neglected animals living in deserted homes. "We want to believe that owners will have the heart to come back and pick them up," he said, but added that the owners seldom return.

Families already stretched financially may make pets a low priority, KCAL9 News reports, and leave pets behind when forced to move. Such abandonment, however, is against the law, animal control officials said.

"It is animal cruelty," Alarcon explained. "It is a penal code violation that we will pursue."

Alternatives to abandoning pets in these types of situations include looking for dog-friendly housing and working with potential landlords to prove responsibility when moving in with a dog. In doing so, animal welfare organizations, including Best Friends Animal Society of Kanab, Utah, recommend these steps: Plan your move in advance. Contact rental agencies at least six weeks before you plan to move. Understand the reasons why many landlords do not want pets in their properties. Be prepared to explain why you are a responsible dog owner and will be a responsible tenant and neighbor. Contact your local animal shelter; staff may be able to provide a list of pet-friendly housing developments. Provide documentation citing your responsibility as a dog owner. Such documents can include statements from your current neighbors as well as copies of veterinary records. Offer to bring your dog to meet the property owner or manager, and invite the landlord to visit your current home. Make sure your pet and your home are in top condition for this visit. Obtain permission in writing. Such documents can protect your rights as well as those of your landlord.

For pet owners caught in a financial crunch, animal welfare organizations suggest making smart decisions about pet care costs. The ASPCA offers these tips to cut your costs as a pet owner, making the responsibility less of a financial burden. Provide regular veterinary care. Annual veterinary exams can catch health problems before they become expensive crises. Give your dog regular at-home exams. Check for lumps, bumps, discharge, and scabs. Pay attention to your cat or dog's eating and drinking habits. Spay or neuter your cat or dog. These surgeries reduce the potential for diseases that target the reproductive organs. Many animal welfare organizations offer discounts on these surgeries for low-income families. Set a budget for toys and accessories and stick to it. The best gifts you can give your cat or dog are love and attention. Keep your cat safe inside, and make sure your dog walks outside on a leash. You can avoid costly veterinary treatments by keeping your pets safe from outside accidents. Consider pet health insurance to minimize expenses from unexpected veterinary treatments.