

Operating Guideline # 831

Responding to Animals Left in Motor Vehicles

August 8, 2023



PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Operating Guideline is to provide direction to staff regarding the rescue of animals in motor vehicles, including the authority for firefighters to enter motor vehicles to rescue and remove animals in distress.

ISSUE/RATIONALE:

Ontario's [Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019](#) (PAWS Act) came into effect on January 1, 2020 and allows police, First Nations constables and provincial animal welfare inspectors to enter motor vehicles to remove animals in critical distress. In accordance with the [Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997](#) (FPPA), the Muskoka Lakes Township municipal council has set a service level including the rescue of animals in motor vehicles by way of resolution # GFC-6-11/08/21 in August 2021. This change coupled with the FPPA provides authority for firefighters to enter motor vehicles to rescue and remove animals in distress.

GUIDELINE:

General

1. Upon receipt of an alarm to a site where an animal in distress incident is occurring, Muskoka Lakes Fire Dispatch shall dispatch the closest Station pumper apparatus to attend the location for size up and confirmation.
2. All staff that perform rescue of animals in distress in motor vehicles must take the [e training module](#) and have the certificate on file in their training records that proves they have received this training.
The training can be found at <https://ofc.cerps.ca/mod/scorm/view.php?id=47233>.
3. Leaving a pet in a hot or cold vehicle can put the animal at risk of serious illness and possibly death. The most dramatic rise in temperature happens in the first 10 to 20 minutes that a vehicle is idle, for example when the outside temperature is 25 degree Celsius a vehicle can heat up to 34 degrees in 10 minutes, 40 degrees in 20 minutes, 40 degrees in 45 minutes and 48 degrees in 1 hour.
4. The public is advised not to enter the vehicle but to report any animal left unattended in a hot or cold vehicle by calling 911 as this is considered an emergency.
5. There are 3 relevant sections that give firefighters authority to enter vehicles where an emergency is occurring in the FPPA. Firefighters can rely on our authority determined by Council to perform this service.
6. Protection from legal proceedings being commenced is also provided by the FPPA, this is for actions done in good faith by firefighters in the execution of their duties. This OG confirms that "Animal rescue in motor vehicles" is a duty, therefore protection afforded.
7. Assessing the animals condition includes monitoring the animal for key signs including the following:

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SIGNS OF CRITICAL DISTRESS AND HEAT STROKE (HOT WEATHER)

- Excessive panting
- Increased drooling
- Anxious or Dazed look
- Stumbling
- Lethargy
- The animal may also appear unresponsive or sleeping.
- Weakness
- Vomiting
- Restlessness
- Collapse
- Listlessness
- Muscle twitching
- Diarrhea
- Blue / purple / bright red gums
- Seizure
- Excessive grooming / vocalizing

SIGNS OF CRITICAL DISTRESS OR HYPOTHERMIA (COLD WEATHER)

- Shivering
- Rapid breathing that could lead to shallow breathing
- Pale gums, nose, ears, paws or tail
- Standing hair (goosebumps)
- Listlessness
- Disorientation
- Lethargy
- animal is unresponsive

- Pets that are overweight, elderly, have long hair or thick coats face higher risks of overheating.
- Dogs that have shorter snouts face higher chance of overheating than the average dog.
- Pets with reduced fur and with underlying health conditions are more susceptible to cold temperatures.
- Wear PPE and be prepared to have a blanket, rope, collar or leash if equipped.
- Identify possible aggressive behaviours: growling, hissing, barking, shrieking.
- Consider creating a snappy snare with a pike pole to keep aggressive dogs away from personnel.
- Approach the animal calmly, making gentle movements.
- Speak to the pet in a soft, quiet calm tone.
- Limit the handlers to a low number to not alarm the animal.
- Strategically place personnel around the scene to limit bolting.
- Create only one opening in the vehicle.
- Once the animal is removed try to do the following to relieve distress:

Heat Stroke	Hypothermia / Frostbite
Take the animal away from sunny/hot area to a cooler/shaded area	Wrap the animal in a warm blanket and move them to a warmer space
Try to lower the animal's body temperature with cool water and a damp cloth	Use warmed up water bottles or a heat pad to place on the animal's stomach area, wrap the bottles / pad in a towel
Apply cool wet towels to the back of the neck, groin area, armpit, wet the ear flaps and wet paws	Provide warm fluids for drinking
Do not apply ice packs. Sudden exposure to cold or ice could shock the animal.	Do not place animal in warm water
Use an oxygen mask to provide air if required	

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20. After the removal of an animal from a vehicle, a firefighter may wish to contact the following personnel, as appropriate, to assist.

Provincial Animal Welfare Inspector	Local Municipal Animal Services – O.S.P.C.A.	O.P.P.
1 833 926 4625	(705) 645-6225	(705)645-2211 or 1-888-310-1122
Call this number when you believe that the animal is showing signs of abuse or the owner has ignored care for the animal. This is also a great number for resources to revive an animal that has experienced distress.	Call this number when there is no where to take the animal and there is no owner present. This service may offer full veterinary care.	Call this number when the animal is showing signs of abuse and the owner has refused to get care for their animal OR if you believe that this situation may involve your safety as it relates to threatening language or acts. This is also a good number to call if the Provincial Animal inspector is not available

RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of all firefighting staff to comply with the provisions of this Operating Guideline.

REFERENCES:

- [Ontario Fire Marshal Communiqué 2021-06: Responding to animals left in motor vehicles](#)
- [Muskoka Lakes Township General Finance Report](#)