

## Ever Wonder How To Make a Difference To the Pet Next Door? So Do We.

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While helping animals is a daily job for the staff at the SPCA, I want you to know that, just like you, we each struggle with how to help the pet next door.

Every morning I walk by a house with outside dogs. Four beagles live in a 4' x 8' enclosure off the ground. They bark and howl plaintively when I walk past. They seem desperate for human affection. It breaks my heart.

I've never seen the dogs out of the enclosure, but, then again, I live a few streets over and don't sit and watch them all day. But, I felt like I should do something.

I briefly considered calling animal control to report the offender but while the dogs are neglected, no law is being broken. The dogs have shelter and, it appears, adequate food and water. They are not suffering physically or in eminent danger. Therefore, by law, they are fine. But I know that they need and yearn for so much more – love, companionship, a warm or cool and dry place to live.

I left an article in the owner's mailbox about backyard dogs and their poor quality of life. I wrote on the top: "I'm concerned about the quality of life of your pets." I didn't sign it. I wanted to help, but I felt lost.

### Have you ever felt the same way?

Every day you drive past a dog tied to a tree, slowly losing its mind. Every day you see the same neighbor's cat curled up under a car and worry about the morning that you forget to honk the horn in case it's under yours.

Our own personal daily struggles drove us to want to help you and the pets in your neighborhood. You *can* help the animals in your neighborhood. Even if the law isn't on your side, you can let neighbors know that there is a better way. **The more you do it, the less scary it becomes.** And, maybe, they will listen and take better care of their pets, or open their hearts to letting you help.

To the right you will find a letter for your use. Cut it out and use it. Copy it and use it again and again. Let it inspire your own letter. Familiarize yourself with the laws (read the article above) so you can recognize when law enforcement does need to be called and when a letter from a concerned neighbor just might do the trick.

### How to use this letter:

Our intention is that, on the form letter, you check off the concern that you have for the animal(s) in question as well as the relevant law listed below.

We've selected just a few of the many concerns that you may share about animals in our neighborhood. It's just the first step, but we hope it helps. 🐾

## Defining Cruelty: Knowing When To Call the Police or When To Leave a Letter

When I conduct educational programs, we discuss what the acronym SPCA stands for: Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

We discuss the individual meanings of the words and then the implication of putting these words together. Participants easily define *society*, *prevention*, and, of course, *animals*; but the word *cruelty* often trips them up.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "cruel" as: "1-disposed to inflict pain or suffering; devoid of humane feelings 2-a: causing or conducive to injury, grief, or pain b: unrelieved by leniency."

Yet, people often do not assign the same value to the word "cruelty" when applying it to animals.

Abuse and cruelty to animals is illegal in North Carolina. *Abuse* and *cruelty* also include *neglect*.

There is a range of criteria that constitute abuse and cruelty at the state, county, and city levels. The difference in how these cases are treated

is determined by their appointment as misdemeanor or felony crimes.

Wake County Animal Control Ordinance: The definition of abuse in Wake County includes, but is not limited to, failing to provide adequate food and water for more than 24 hours; failing to provide adequate shelter; beating and torturing animals (among other things) resulting in physical pain, suffering, or death; and "failing to provide adequate medical attention for any sick, diseased, or injured animal in order to prevent physical pain, suffering, or death to the animal." This is only a sampling of the definition of "abuse" of animals in Wake County.

You can read the entire ordinance and the definition at [www.wakegov.com/pets/safety/ordinance.htm](http://www.wakegov.com/pets/safety/ordinance.htm).

In **Section 2-3-5 Cruelty to Animals** the ordinance states "The words 'torture' and 'torment' shall be held to include every act, omission or neglect whereby unjustifiable physical pain, suffering or death is permitted."

North Carolina General Statutes: Article 47. Cruelty to Animals.

State law is closely mirrored by the county law but it elaborates on what qualifies as a *misdemeanor* or a *felony*.

Cruelty to animals committed **intentionally** – an act committed knowingly and without justifiable excuse – is a Class 1 misdemeanor. Cruelty to animals committed **maliciously** – an act committed intentionally and with malice or bad motive – is guilty of a Class 1 felony.

Abuse, cruelty and neglect of animals is illegal in our state. It empowers us to take action when we understand how our government defines these words. **If you see an animal being treated in a way that falls into these categories, call your local law enforcement immediately.**

If you are concerned about an animal's quality of life but the animal is not being neglected according to the law, we've provided a handy letter for you below.

– Vanessa Budnick



### Dear Neighbor,

I am leaving you this letter because I am concerned about the welfare and quality of life of your pet. I wanted to give you some information that I hope will help you better understand a pet's needs and those of your neighbors. **This letter is meant to make your life, your pet's life, and your neighbors' lives better.**

#### IT CONCERNS ME TO SEE:

**Your cat or dog loose in the neighborhood.**

A cat or dog loose in the neighborhood runs the risk of getting hurt or hurting others. A loose pet can be hit by a car, run away and get lost, get into fights or be attacked by other animals, be exposed to disease through contact with unvaccinated pets or wild animals, be harmed by people or harm people, be picked up by animal control officers, be stolen, get into pesticides, antifreeze or other things that could kill them.

**Your cat or dog left outside without proper food, water, or shelter.**

A cat or dog left outside without proper food, water, or shelter can suffer from starvation, thirst, exposure and accidental death. A pet should be fed one to two times a day, always have access to fresh water, and be provided with a shelter of at least three sides, a roof and a floor. Ideally, your cat would be an indoor cat and your dog would live inside the home with the family. Cats and dogs have been raised to live with humans and they become lonely, depressed, and anxious if isolated outdoors, alone.

**Your cat or dog outdoors without a collar and proper identification and rabies tags.**

A cat or dog outdoors without a collar and proper identification and rabies tags can be picked up by animal control or get lost. Without a collar and proper ID tags, you increase the chances of never being reunited with your pet.

I also wanted to make you aware of just a few of the laws that protect your pets and help the community. These are excerpted or summarized from the NC General Statutes as well as the Wake County Animal Control Ordinance and the municipal codes of Raleigh, Cary, and Garner. They directly relate to the concerns listed above.

**Section 2-3-7. Animals at Large (this applies to dogs AND cats)**

"The Animal Control Section shall confiscate any animal found to be at large and impound it..." ("At Large: Any animal shall be deemed at large when it is off the real property of its owner and not under the restraint [such as a leash] of a competent person.")

**Section 2-3-6. Adequate Feed, Water and Shelter**

"All dogs and cats shall be given adequate food, adequate water and adequate shelter. Adequate shelter is an enclosure of at least three (3) sides, a roof and a floor. The enclosure shall be ventilated and must have sufficient room for the animal(s) to move about freely and to lie comfortably."

**Section 2-3-23. Inoculation of Dogs, Cats and Other Pets**

"It shall be unlawful for an owner to fail to provide current inoculation against rabies for any dog or cat four (4) months of age or older."

Raleigh, Cary, and Garner require pets be licensed with the city and wear the license tag at all times.

*I hope that you can accept this letter with an open heart and open mind. I've provided it with the best of intentions for the safety and welfare of your pet.*

Sincerely,

Your Neighbor

This letter was provided by the SPCA of Wake County. Please visit [www.spcawake.org](http://www.spcawake.org) for more information or call 919-772-2326.