



Wisconsin's new dog seller law:

Protecting dogs and people

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE & CONSUMER PROTECTION | DIVISION OF ANIMAL HEALTH

For a long time, Wisconsin was the “wild west” when it came to regulating the dog industry. We had no licensing requirement, few laws to protect the dogs, and nothing to protect you, the buyer. Although we had many very good breeders and rescuers, we were attracting a lot of bad actors. We received frequent calls and emails, complaining about dogs kept in filthy, crowded conditions, or about \$300 puppies with thousands of dollars worth of health problems. But there was nothing we could do about it.

Now we can. Effective June 1, 2011, some dog breeders and their kennels will need to be licensed and inspected, as will most dog shelters and rescue groups. In order to be licensed, they will have to treat their dogs humanely and give buyers/adopters health certificates for the dogs.

There's been some confusion about what this new law. Here are the facts.

There's confusion about. . .

The facts are. . .

Who needs a license

- **Not** pet owners, dog trainers, and small hobby breeders
- The law requires licenses **only** for:
 - Dog breeders** *selling at least 25 dogs a year from 4 or more litters*
 - Dog breeding facilities** *selling at least 25 dogs a year from 4 or more litters*
 - Dog dealers** *selling at least 25 dogs a year in Wisconsin*
 - Non-profit animal shelters** *sheltering at least 25 dogs a year*
 - Animal control facilities** that contract with a city, village, town or county
- No one else needs a license under any other circumstances. There is no plan to extend the law to cover anyone else, and we have no resources to do so.

What the standards of care require

- The standards are what you or any pet owner would want and expect for your dog. They provide for adequate food, water, shelter, and care. They help assure that animals are treated humanely and buyers receive healthy animals.
- They address the complaints we have heard for years, and are similar to standards in other states that regulate dog sales and adoptions.
- The standards say that dogs must have:
 - Clean, safe cages or enclosures, that are large enough to allow them to move naturally and that protect them from the elements
 - An adequate supply of clean water and clean, palatable, nutritious food
 - Daily exercise
 - Daily contact with humans and other dogs
 - Veterinary care when they are sick
 - Safe, comfortable transportation
- They are flexible to accommodate different breeds and sizes of dogs.

Who pays the costs

- License fees paid by the dog breeders and other licensed businesses and groups will pay the entire cost – including salaries and benefits for five enforcement staff members, clerical support, supplies, training, and all other administrative costs.
- No general taxpayer funds will support this program. If funding falls short, the law prohibits us from shifting other funds to support it. We would have to make cuts to the program or ask the Legislature to increase the license fees.
- License fees range from \$125 a year for non-profit animal shelters to \$1,000 a year for someone selling at least 250 dogs a year. The fees should not be burdensome for viable non-profits or businesses.
- Breeders who have good facilities and practices should not need major investments to meet the new standards.
- Those who now have to upgrade substantially may have new costs. They may choose to pass those costs on to you, the buyer. But with this law in place, you're far less likely to get a puppy that arrives in your home with ailments that will lead to high veterinary bills or even death. And you're less likely to bring home a puppy that will bite or attack your children, or damage furniture and other property because it hasn't been properly socialized.

Who will enforce this law

- DATCP conducts more than 43,000 inspections a year on businesses ranging from Christmas trees to food processors and including more than 700 inspections of animal-related businesses. Our inspectors work on behalf of Wisconsin consumers. Their job is to protect people, animals, and the environment. We hire inspectors with experience and training in the areas they inspect, and often with law enforcement backgrounds as well.
- To enforce this particular law, we've hired inspectors with knowledge of animal husbandry, veterinary care, animal law and similar types of expertise. These inspectors do not need experience in dog breeding, because they are not inspecting reproductive practices. You do not have to be a dog breeder to evaluate sanitation, space, exercise and socialization for dogs, or to see when they need veterinary care.
- If inspectors see a problem so serious that humans, animals or the environment are in imminent danger, they will take immediate action. Normally, inspections are more like consultations with the business owner or manager. If we find minor violations, they can often be corrected on the spot or within a few days. Our goal is always to solve the problem, not to punish.
- We do not have authority to issue citations, seize animals, or bring charges in court, and our inspectors are not armed. When we need that level of enforcement, we ask for help from the local sheriff, police or district attorney. This is a last resort. We'd rather just solve the problem.

Need more information?

- Go to <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, click on "Dog sellers and shelters" under Animals
- Email DATCPanimals@wi.gov
- Call 608-224-4872