



Reporting Guide for Veterinarians Assisting with Animal Cruelty or Neglect Cases

The Washington State Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Program, offers this report writing guide for veterinarians serving as subject matter experts in animal cruelty or neglect cases in Washington State. This document should not be construed as a source of legal advice or a mandated form; it is offered to help examining veterinarians generate accurate and comprehensive reports and well-grounded professional opinion statements. Definitions of terms are included in the Revised Code of Washington, [RCW 16.52.011](#). This outline will guide veterinarians through the report writing process and the key elements to document to be consistent with veterinary forensics standards.

Part 1: Case Details

Start by recording key contact and animal signalment information.

Animal Control or Local Law Enforcement Information

- Date of exam
- Requesting law enforcement agency
- Animal control or law enforcement officer assigned to the case
- Law enforcement case number
- Case history: document history provided by animal control

Veterinarian Information

- Veterinarian name
- Veterinarian business/practice name
- Veterinarian contact information
- Veterinarian's credentials: education, experience, certifications, specialization, or other training

Owner Information

- Owner name
- Owner address and contact information

Animal Information

- Animal identification: number, tattoo, name, brand, microchip, or any other ID
- Animal species, breed, and description
- Animal status: alive, deceased, euthanized
- Animal location: if different from owner's address
- Animal inventory: number of animals on site by species

Part 2: Animal Welfare Assessment

When performing the animal welfare assessment, the World Organisation for Animal Health ([OIE Five Freedoms framework](#)) may be referenced.

1. Freedom from hunger, malnutrition, and thirst.
2. Freedom from fear and distress.
3. Freedom from heat stress or physical discomfort.
4. Freedom from pain, injury and disease.
5. Freedom to express normal patterns of behavior.

Four of these points include “emotional state or feelings” including hunger, discomfort, pain, fear, and distress. These are critical terms to use in your assessment. The report can be broken down into four main areas: Environmental Assessment, Nutritional Assessment, Animal Assessment, and Mortality and Disposal Assessment.

1) **Environmental Assessment** ([RCW 16.52.207 part 2a](#))

- Determine if the environmental conditions provide the animal with necessary shelter, rest, sanitation, or space.
 - i. Shelter: Describe the type of bedding and shelter provided.
 - ii. Sanitation: Describe husbandry practices and how standards are met or deficient.
 - iii. Space: Describe bunk, water and shelter space. Determine if animals can all eat or rest at the same time. Describe competition for resources, and the impact of social dynamics on herd health.
- Give your professional opinion of whether the animal suffers unnecessary or unjustifiable physical pain (discomfort, fear or distress) as a result of any identified failures.

2) **Nutrition Assessment** ([RCW 16.52.205 part 2](#))

- Determine if an animal has been starved or deprived water.
 - i. Document nutritional needs including quantity required based on age/size, pregnancy or lactation status. Reference a reliable [species-specific nutrition resource](#) such as the Merck Veterinary Manual at www.merckvetmanual.com/management-and-nutrition.
 - ii. Describe access to resources and the impact of competition at the bunk, trough or hay rack.
 - iii. Determine appropriateness of the feed for the species.
 - iv. Evaluate pasture management as a source of nutrition (animals/ acre, time of year, type).
 - v. Collect grain, hay and water samples for analysis to determine quality.
 - vi. Determine the quantity of feed and water that is required for the species per day based on quality of feedstuffs (lbs. of grain/forage per head, number of flakes of hay, gallons of water).
- Give your professional opinion if substantial and unjustifiable physical pain (hunger or thirst) that extends for a period sufficient to cause considerable suffering or death.

3) **Animal Assessment** ([RCW 16.52.207](#) and [RCW 16.52.205](#))

- Reference Animal Inventory in “case details.”
 - i. If no identification is on the animal, reference the identification assigned by animal control.
 - ii. Take photographs of all animals with identification for reference from four angles (front, left side, right side, and behind).
- For each identified animal, record physical examination findings and note any conditions associated with cruelty or chronic neglect (halter abrasions, untreated wounds, external parasitic infestations, overgrown/ broken hooves, evidence of broken tails, etc.). Note any underlying medical conditions, dental concerns or failure to provide medical attention. Take photographs to support your narrative.
- Assign a Body Condition Score (BCS) for each animal using a validated visual assessment tool.
 - Cattle are typically scored on a [1-5 scale](#). Horses are typically scored on a [1-9 scale](#).
 - Give your assessment of BCS trends and explain your professional opinion as to cause (i.e., malnutrition, parasitism, and/or unaddressed medical condition).
- Collect samples for analysis such as blood, fecal, external parasites, etc.
- Give your professional opinion of whether the animal suffers unnecessary or unjustifiable physical pain as a result of any unaddressed medical conditions.

4) **Mortality and Disposal Assessment** ([RCW 16.36.102](#))

- Document evidence of carcasses on premises that have not been properly disposed of, including exposed carcasses or bones on the premises that could pose a risk to environmental, animal, or public health.
- Document all post-mortem examinations completed and samples collected (bone marrow, stomach contents, organ samples, etc.).

Part 3: Professional Opinion Statement on Animal Pain and Suffering

- State your professional opinion based on your [assessment](#). Emphasize whether you believe the animal(s) have experienced **pain and suffering** including hunger, discomfort, fear, or distress due to cruelty or neglect.
- Outline any corrective actions needed to address your concerns and a timeline for compliance. If you are called to testify, you can refer to your report.
- Oftentimes, cases are not heard until many months to years after the initial investigation, so writing a robust and detailed report is critical to the accuracy of your testimony, strength of the case, and likelihood of prosecutorial success.

