



**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
*City of Albuquerque*

Melissa Santistevan, CIG  
Inspector General

P.O. Box 1293, Suite 5025  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103  
Telephone: (505) 768-3150  
Fax: (505) 768-3158

**Investigative Informative Case Synopsis**

**FILE NO:** 23-0074-C

**SUBJECT MATTER:** Alleged misuse of position and violations of laws, regulations, policies, and procedures by the Animal Welfare Department.

**STATUS:** Final

DocuSigned by:  
*Christopher Saavedra*  
732D07344C4D4C3  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**CHRISTOPHER SAAVEDRA, EnCE, CIGI**  
**INVESTIGATOR**  
**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

September 6, 2023  
**Date of Completion**

DocuSigned by:  
*Melissa R. Santistevan*  
363279ECC7574DA  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**MELISSA SANTISTEVAN, CIG**  
**INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

September 8, 2023  
**Date of Completion**

DocuSigned by:  
*Edmund E. Perea*  
0E28BFACFATA43F  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**EDMUND E. PEREA, ESQ**  
**ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT**  
**OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**

October 25, 2023  
**Date of Approval**

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- Honorable Mayor**
- President City Council**
- Chief Administrative Officer**
- City Councilors**
- Director Council Services**
- City Attorney**
- Department Director**
- Members, Accountability and Government Oversight Committee**
- File**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to City Ordinance 2-17-2, the Inspector General's goals are to (1) Conduct investigations in an efficient, impartial, equitable, and objective manner; (2) Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in city activities including all city contracts and partnerships; (3) Deter criminal activity through independence in fact and appearance, investigation and interdiction; and (4) Propose ways to increase the city's legal, fiscal and ethical accountability to insure that tax payers' dollars are spent in a manner consistent with the highest standards of local governments. The City of Albuquerque Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducts investigations, inspections, evaluations, and reviews in accordance with AIG standards.

On July 27th, 2023, the OIG received an allegation that alleged the mismanagement of the referring party's deceased animal by the Animal Welfare Department (AWD) at the Eastside location, located at 8920 Lomas Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112. The allegation stated that on July 16th, 2023, the referring party was instructed by AWD employees at the Eastside location that they could bring in their deceased animal to that AWD location to be stored until cremation services could be scheduled by the referring party.

The referring party brought their deceased animal to the location as instructed but was informed by an AWD Employee (E1) that the referring party was provided incorrect information. E1 explained that AWD does not store deceased animals for the public, but an exception would be made in this instance. A second AWD Employee (E2), took down the referring party's contact information and pulled the information from the animal's microchip. E2 identified different owner information for the animal. The referring party informed E2 that the previous owners gave the animal to the referring party eight (8) years prior.

On July 17th and 18th, 2023, the referring party attempted to contact AWD with no response. The referring party set up arrangements with an outside private pet crematorium to pick up the deceased animal's body from the AWD Eastside location on July 19, 2023. The pet crematorium was informed upon their arrival at the Eastside location that AWD did not have the animal in question and was unable to identify where the deceased animal was. The referring party was informed that AWD held the deceased animal on a stray hold policy for a week. AWD also stated to the referring party that they attempted to contact the owners listed on the dogs' microchip with no response.

The OIG determined that the allegations contained elements of abuse and that it was appropriate for the OIG to conduct a fact-finding investigation. The purpose of the investigation was to obtain and review the evidence and to determine if the evidence is consistent with concluding whether the allegation of abuse could be substantiated or not substantiated.

The OIG reviewed AWD ordinance and spoke with AWD leadership. The OIG was not able to substantiate the allegation that AWD violated any City Ordinance or AWD policy.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AWD: Animal Welfare Department  
City: City of Albuquerque  
D1: City Director  
E1: City Employee  
E2: City Employee  
OIG: Office of Inspector General

## INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is to provide independent and objective insight, oversight, and foresight in promoting integrity, efficiency, overall effectiveness, accountability, and transparency in government to safeguard and preserve public trust. The City of Albuquerque OIG conducts investigations, inspections, evaluations, and reviews in accordance with AIG standards.

### **Complaint:**

Alleged misuse of position and violations of laws, regulations, policies, and procedures by the Animal Welfare Department.

### **Background:**

On July 16th, 2023 the referring party's family animal was found deceased in their backyard. The referring party called the City of Albuquerque Animal Welfare Department Eastside shelter located at 8920 Lomas Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112. The referring party was informed by AWD that the referring party could either store the animal's body in a freezer until AWD could pick the animal up or bring them to the Eastside location. The referring party brought the animal to the Eastside location. The referring party was informed by E1 with AWD that the referring party was given the wrong information and that AWD does not hold onto deceased animals for the public but that they would make an exception for this time. E2 took down the referring party's contact information. E2 pulled information from the animal microchip and identified different owner information for the animal. The referring party informed E2 that the previous owners gave the dog to the referring party about eight (8) years ago.

The referring party attempted to contact AWD on July 17th and 18th with no response from Animal Welfare. The referring party set up arrangements with an outside private pet crematorium to pick up the animal's body from the AWD Eastside location on July 19, 2023. The pet crematorium employees were then notified upon arrival that the AWD Eastside location did not have the body of the animal in question and were unable to identify where it was.

The referring party was informed that AWD held the animal on a stray hold policy for a week.

AWD also informed the referring party that they attempted to contact the owners listed on the animal's microchip with no response.

The referring party states that they 'have (E2) on video laughing & smiling at the situation'. The referring party stated that they filed a police report about this situation. As of July 23rd, 2023, the referring party stated that no one from AWD had contacted them.

## INVESTIGATION

### Allegation:

Alleged mismanagement of deceased animal by the Animal Welfare Department (AWD)

### Authority:

#### 301.1 Duty to the Public

The City of Albuquerque is a service institution. In carrying out their assigned duties and responsibilities, employees must always remember their first obligation is to the general public. This obligation must be carried out within the framework of federal, state, and local laws.

#### HEART Ordinance § 9-2-4-6 IMPROPER DISPOSAL OF ANIMALS.

Deceased Animals shall be properly disposed of in accordance with this article. Following the death of an Animal, the Owner shall be responsible for removing the corpse immediately and disposing of the body by either private burial, private cremation, or taking the Animal to AACC. It is unlawful to dispose of the body of any Animal by dumping the corpse on public or private property, roads, or rights-of-way.

### Evidence:

HEART Ordinance § 9-2-4-6 IMPROPER DISPOSAL OF ANIMALS

#### Standard Operation Procedure – Handling Dead Animals

Dead animals are to be transported to the freezer away from the public's view. Immediately after death is verified dead animals that arrive at our facility will be taken directly to the freezer. Dead animals are never to be left where the public has access. All dead bodies are handled with dignity and respect at all times. It is unacceptable to drag, hurl, or throw bodies from a distance to skin an animal, to remove any body parts, or to otherwise deform a body. All dead animals will be transported to the landfill by the DOA driver unless the body is picked up by its owner. The DOA driver will check for ID and scan for microchips if picking an animal up from the roadside. If an owner is found the DOA driver will contact the owner. If an owner cannot be located the DOA driver will impound the animal and put the body in an orange bag labeled with a kennel card and hold it for the required stray days.

**Analysis:**

The OIG reviewed the HEART Ordinance for AWD and identified § 9-2-4-6 IMPROPER DISPOSAL OF ANIMALS. The OIG spoke to D1 with the AWD and requested policies and procedures for AWD. D1 was aware of the referring party's situation through independent inquiry. D1 stated that the matter with the referring party had been resolved and that no policy or procedure existed that addressed the unique situation identified by the referring party. D1 stated that AWD was in the process of addressing the lack of policy by creating a standard operating procedure for situations similar to the referring parties.

The OIG requested similar relevant policies and procedures for review. D1 provided the OIG with Standard Operation Procedure – Handling Dead Animals and Field Structure – DOA Drivers. The OIG reviewed the provided procedures and identified that they did not apply to the allegation provided by the referring party.

**Conclusion:**

Based on the evidence obtained, the allegation that AWD mismanaged the deceased animal surrendered to them could not be substantiated as AWD employees at the Eastside location followed the established ordinances, policies, and procedures that govern AWD.

**General Observations:**

AWD should establish a policy or procedure, which establishes a methodology to follow when a citizen requests for AWD to temporarily hold a deceased animal until funeral arrangements can be made. The OIG will follow up to ensure a policy was created.

**Management's Response:**

AWD agrees that we should establish a standard operating procedure to capture temporary holds on deceased animals. We will develop and implement it by September 30, 2023.