

March 2026

The ACO Voice

A Monthly Magazine from the Animal Control & Care Academy ■ The Only Monthly Publication Dedicated to Animal Control



**What's in a Name?
Putting Terms in Context**



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Notes from our Senior Instructor...

Greetings to all!

Retractable leashes. I've seen FaceBook posts and heard people complain about or bash retractable leashes off and on for years, but I couldn't wrap my head around it. I've heard and read comments like, "Retractable leashes should be outlawed," and they are "dangerous and don't control the animal." A retractable leash is a tool, not something that has a mind of its own. It is never going to control the animal, and since they themselves don't cause injury to the animal, they probably shouldn't be outlawed. I was recently asked if I could help craft language for an ordinance that would make it illegal for an animal's owner to walk the animal on a retractable leash. Apparently, someone had not used the retractable leash properly and the dog tried to attack a child on a bike. While trying to get the dog away from the child, the dog was chased between two cars and nearly caused a car accident. Ensuing complaints about the situation led to crafting language to ban the use of retractable leashes. Retractable leashes are tools controlled by a person. When properly used by the owner, the animal can have a greater range when being walked, and the owner has the ability to shorten it when there are other people around or when walking near a roadway. There are certainly devices that can cause pain and suffering to an animal such as logging chains securing puppies, pinch collars, etc. A retractable leash has pros and cons, and it's not the device, but the improper use of the device that causes issues. Just my opinion....

JT Taylor

Senior Instructor, ACCA

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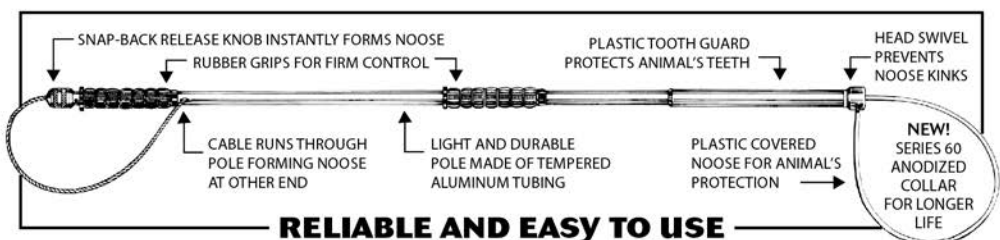
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Sincerely,

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What's in a Name? Putting Terms in Context

William Shakespeare famously asked the question, "What's in a name?" in Act Two, Scene Two of his play *Romeo and Juliet*. He followed the question with the clarification statement, "That which we call a rose / by any other name would smell as sweet," implying that a name or a word does not change the nature or value of the object. In animal care and control law, as it is in other types of statutes and ordinances, the improper use of a word or name can have a major impact on the law or on a trial over alleged violations. Names and words do matter as the misunderstanding or use can change the nature of the word.

Animal Care and Control Academy has taught for years the need for properly identifying the name of a breed of animal. Saying Johnny Schemedlapp let his pitbull run at large in violation of ordinance xyz is not a good idea. If Johnny shows up in court and says, "But your Honor, I don't own a pitbull, I own an American Staffordshire Terrier," it can negatively impact the course of the case. Identifying the dog as a German Shepherd running at large only to have the owner show up and say he or she doesn't own a German Shepherd, but rather has an Australian Shepherd or Belgian Malinois casts doubt on the ACOs training and qualifications as well as muddies the water in the court proceedings. Misidentifying a breed can create reasonable doubt. ACOs are best served by saying "German Shepherd-type" dog or "pitbull-type dog" rather than risk misstating the identification of the alleged offending animal.

Another often mistakenly used term is "stray." In modern usage, the word "stray" is used to describe a homeless or unowned animal "without a permanent home or human care, that survives on the street or in public areas." "Owned at large" is used to describe an owned animal that is running loose off the property of its owner. The definition of the word stray as a verb, however, is to move away aimlessly from a group or from the right course or place. As applied to animals, its usage is in statements like, "Dog owners are urged not to allow their dogs to stray." This refers to an animal that has strayed from the property of its owner.

Another misused term is feral, which is often used to describe a "wild" dog or cat that is afraid of humans and will be very aggressive. Generally though, ordinances define feral as a domestic species of animal that is unowned and has returned to its wild nature, is capable of surviving without human intervention, and is not someone's pet.

Can the misuse of a name or term impact an ACO's case in court? Technically, yes.

It appears the biggest problem on this subject is that the misuse of names or terms appear in local ordinances and occasionally in state statutes. "Pitbull" is not a breed of dog, but rather a category of dog types, made up of several specific breeds. Typically, the name usually includes the American Pit Bull Terrier, the American Staffordshire Terri-

er, and the Bull Terrier, as well as other breeds and crossbreeds that share specific physical characteristics with these breeds, such as Cane Corso, Dogo Argentino, Presa Canario, and most of the mastiff breeds.

When local laws ban ownership of "pitbulls" in a community or make specific regulatory requirements for pitbulls such as mandatory sterilization or mandatory muzzling when outside of the home, there is a disconnect that creates the opportunity for use or misuse of the law. "It shall be unlawful for the owner or keeper of any pitbull to allow said pitbull to be outside of the residence without being muzzled and physically restrained by an owner who is capable of controlling the dog," opens the door for local authorities to claim any dog that resembles a pitbull is a pitbull, while also recreating the opportunity for the owner to defend themselves in court by showing that their dog is a Boxer, which is clearly not a pitbull.

The use of proper terms or names is important, the misuse of which can change the nature of the name or word. The rose, called by some other name, still smells sweet regardless of what it is called. "Running at large" or a "stray roaming" means the animal is off of the property of its owner without being on a leash and/or under control of its owner. Words and names matter, regardless of how they smell.



A Pitbull by Any Other Name?

Breeds of dogs having common pitbull-type traits are often lumped into the category of pitbull due only to some physical features and not because they are descended from Staffordshire and other terrier ancestry.

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May 4-7, 2026 • Springfield, Missouri

Schedule of Training

Animal Attack Investigation and Reporting; Animal Crime Scene Photography, Videography and Sketching; Animal Hoarding Investigations; Illegal Animal Fighting; Livestock and Exotics Cases; Obtaining and Executing Search Warrants; Officer Safety in the Field; Proactive Animal Control; Using Forensics in Animal Cruelty Investigations

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October 8-9, 2026 • Clarksville, Tennessee

Animal Shelter Technician Certification • Hosted by the Springfield - Greene County Health Department
October 13-15, 2026 • Springfield, Missouri

Schedule of Training

Animal Care in a Sheltering Environment; Animal Disposition Options; Animal Identification: Breed and Description; Animal Shelter Design and Operations; Animal Shelter Record-Keeping; Canine and Feline Behaviors and Assessments; Disease Exposures in a Sheltering Environment; Emergency Animal Sheltering; Proactive Animal Sheltering

Comprehensive Animal Management Certification • Hosted by the Platte County Sheriff's Dept.
November 30 - December 2, 2026 • Kansas City, Missouri

Schedule of Training

Advanced Case Supervision; Basic Budget Planning; Disciplinary Investigations; Equipment, Vehicles and Operational Needs; Evaluating Staff; Interviewing and Selection; Managing Generational Employees; Meetings: Individual, Specific Groups, Entire Staff; Policy and Procedures: Review and Development; Pushing Paperwork: Reports, Memos and Correspondence; Supervising Daily Operations; Training and Staff Development; Transition from Staff to Supervisor; Workplace Harassment and Violence

“The ACO Voice”

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"The ACO Voice" is an electronic magazine that is published 12 times each year by the Animal Control & Care Academy to provide information of interest to Animal Control Officers. Advertising is provided on a space-available basis.

Publication Dates: The first week of each month.

Available ad sizes are: Full Page (7½" x 10") and Half Page (7½" x 5")

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