



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

About Charles County's Animal Regulations



Frequently Asked Questions About Charles County Animal Regulations

1. What are the duties of a responsible pet owner?

You should exercise reasonable care and take all necessary steps and precautions to protect other people, property, and animals from injuries or damage which might result from the animal's behavior, regardless of whether the behavior is motivated by playfulness, fear, sickness, or ferocity. In addition, if a minor is the custodian of an animal, the parent or guardian is still responsible for ensuring compliance with regulations and State codes. Don't forget that animals may not be sold or given to a minor without the written consent of the parent or legal guardian.

2. What must I do to properly immunize my animal from rabies?

State and County laws require that all dogs, cats, and ferrets four months or older be immunized with an antirabies vaccine administered by a licensed veterinarian. The veterinarian will issue you a certificate of immunization. **DO NOT LOSE THIS CERTIFICATE!** You should keep it in a safe place and be able to show it to an Animal Control Officer, Health Officer, or any other law enforcement officer upon request.

Reduced-cost rabies clinics are held periodically throughout the County. Call the Humane Society of Charles County at 301-645-8181 for more information.

3. What are the rules about licensing my animal?

Dogs and cats four months or older must be licensed. The license is only good for one year from issue, therefore, you need to renew the license annually.

You can purchase a license through the Charles County Treasurer's Office, Charles County Animal Control, the Charles County Humane Society, and other participating locations. The cost is \$25 for an unaltered male or female, or \$5 for a neutered male or spayed female.

If you own a certified Seeing Eye Dog, Hearing Dog, governmental police dog, or other certified dog that is trained to assist the physically handicapped, you are not required to pay the annual fee but you still need to license your dog every year.

Dogs that are being kept at shelters are exempt from licensing until they are adopted or returned to their owner.

4. What are the County's regulations regarding animal care?

You must provide your animal with sufficient, wholesome and nutritious food; clean, cool water in sufficient quantities; proper air, shelter, space, and protection from the weather; veterinary care, when needed, to prevent suffering; and humane care and treatment at all times. Pets can not be tethered outside for more than 4 (four) hours a day. Minimum kennel sizes are also identified in the regulations.

Remember, when transporting your animal in a vehicle, the animal must be safely confined. Your animal is not allowed to ride in an unenclosed area of your vehicle unless he/she is confined by a securely affixed, well-ventilated cage, or other device designated to safely prevent the animal from falling or jumping from your vehicle.

5. Can I let my animal roam around?

NO! It is against the law for any person, partnership or corporation to allow their animal to be at large. At large means allowing any animal (dog, cat, or other) to be away from its owner's property not under the restraint of a person capable of controlling the animal. In general the animal must be controlled by a leash.

This law does not apply to a dog undergoing supervised obedience training or while actually engaged in the sport of hunting in an authorized area while supervised by a competent person.

6. Is there a "pooper scooper" law in Charles County?

YES! It is against the law to allow your domestic animal to defecate on public property, or private property that does not belong to the pet's owner. Any waste must be removed and disposed of in a proper and sanitary manner.

7. What is the Animal Matters Hearing Board?

The Animal Matters Hearing Board hears and decides, upon receipt of a written complaint, whether an animal, or facility regulated by Charles County Animal Regulations, constitutes a public nuisance or is dangerous and/or vicious. The Board consists of not more than nine members appointed by the County

Commissioners. These members include a representative from the Charles County Office of the Sheriff, Charles County Humane Society, a veterinarian licensed to practice in Charles County, and four other Charles County Citizens.

8. When could my animal be considered a public nuisance?

If the owner allows it to:

- roam around
- damage the property of anyone other than its owner
- molest or intimidate pedestrians or passersby
- chase vehicles
- bark or make other harsh or excessive noise so as to disturb the quiet, comfort, or repose of members of the community
- create an unreasonable annoyance or discomfort, by odor or any other means, to neighbors or others in close proximity to the premises where the animal is kept
- defecate on public property, and/or defecate or urinate on private property (other than that of the owner), or
- continue or repeat that behavior or activity for which the animal has previously been determined by the Board after notice to its owner and a hearing, to be in violation of any of these regulations and/or a public nuisance by virtue of being a menace to the public health, welfare or safety

If you feel an animal in your neighborhood is a public nuisance, and wish the County to take action, you must file a written complaint with the Animal Matters Hearing Board, which will hear and decide the matter. A white complaint form is included in the center of this publication. Complete both sides of the form and send to: Animal Matters Hearing Board for Charles County, Maryland, at Charles County Government, P.O. Box 2150, La Plata, Maryland 20646.

For more information, please call the County Attorney's office at 301-645-0517 or 301-870-2260.

9. How could my animal be impounded?

If your animal is in violation of any of the Charles County Animal Regulations or the Annotated Code of Maryland, it can be immediately and humanely impounded and housed at the animal shelter or its designated agent. In addition to or in lieu of impounding your animal, an Animal Control Officer may issue you a notice of violation.

If your animal is impounded, it will be kept for no less than three working days unless the animal is contagiously ill or severely injured.

When you reclaim your animal, you will have to pay fees established by the Sheltering Authority. You also will have to show proof of ownership, including a current rabies vaccination and County license.

If your animal is impounded three times within a twelve-month period, it shall remain in the Shelter until you appear before the Animal Matters Hearing Board's next scheduled hearing. The Board will determine the necessary means to resolve the violations and levy any applicable fines and fees.

10. What kind of fines are there? How much will they cost me?

Interference with an Animal Control Office	\$250
Cruelty	\$50-\$1,000
Rabies Prevention:	
Failure to vaccinate	\$100
Failure to quarantine	\$100
Licensing - Failure to obtain a(n):	
Individual	\$50
Fancier	\$150
Commercial Animal Establishment	\$250
Animal care (per offense)	\$35
Animal riding in an open vehicle	\$50
Animal at Large	\$50
Female in Season, Improperly Confined	\$50
Allowing an animal to urinate/defecate on private property	\$50
Allowing an animal to defecate on public property	\$50
Public Nuisance	\$50-\$200
Dangerous or Vicious or Potentially Dangerous	\$50-\$1,000

If you have any further questions, please call the Charles County Animal Control Services at 301-609-3425.

You may also contact the Tri-County Animal Shelter at 301-932-1713 or 1-800-903-1992.

The Shelter is located at 6707 Animal Shelter Road, Hughesville, Maryland, on Route 231 approximately 3.5 miles from the intersection of Route 5.

Learn more at www.CharlesCountyMD.gov

Conduct of Public Hearing Before an Animal Matters Hearing Board

1. All persons who testify or make statements shall be required to take an oath as administered by the Clerk of the Animal Matters Hearing Board.
2. All persons who testify or make statements shall be required to come to an area designated by the Chairman and state their name and address in order that the proceedings may be properly recorded. Testimony may be limited in time by the Board.
3. Written statements may not be accepted by the Board. Each witness should be present in order to be questioned.
4. You may bring witnesses to testify on your behalf.
5. You may bring exhibits such as properly marked and dated photographs, a list of the times and dates the animal disturbed you, and video tapes. If a video tape is to be presented, you must notify the Clerk to the Animal Matters Hearing Board at least seven days prior to the scheduled hearing so that equipment can be available.
6. If testimony of an Animal Control Officer or other County employee is requested, you must provide notice in writing to the Clerk of the Animal Matters Hearing Board at least seven days prior to the hearing.
7. Owners of dogs and cats must bring the subject animal's rabies vaccination certificate and County license to the hearing. Owners of ferrets must bring the subject animal's rabies vaccination certificate.
8. Failure of a complainant to appear at the hearing will result in dismissal of the case.
9. Failure of an Owner to appear at the hearing, after being served with notice of the hearing and a copy of the complaint, may result in a decision being made, and restrictions and fines imposed on the Owner, based solely upon the Complainant's testimony and any other evidence presented at the hearing.
10. In the event you do not agree with the Board's decision, you have thirty (30) days to file an appeal, which must be in writing. We cannot assist you in the appeal process. If you have any questions about your rights, you should contact an attorney other than the County Attorney or the Assistant County Attorney.

