METHODS PRESCRIBED OR APPROVED FOR ANIMAL EUTHANASIA AND COMPETENCY CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

PURPOSE

This Directive sets forth methods that are currently prescribed or approved by the State Veterinarian for the euthanasia of animals by all persons acting under the provisions of the Virginia Comprehensive Animal Care laws (Title 3.2, Chapter 65).

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Section 1: AUTHORITY

Title 3.2, Chapter 65 of the Code of Virginia authorizes the **State Veterinarian** to prescribe or approve methods for the euthanasia of animals pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

The **Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF)** has authority for the prescription and approval of wildlife euthanasia methods. Persons euthanizing wildlife should do so according to the Code of Virginia, regulations promulgated by the DGIF, and associated guidance documents.

The **Virginia Board of Pharmacy** and the **US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)** has authority over the distribution, handling, and dispensing of veterinary pharmaceuticals. Persons using controlled substances for the euthanasia of animals under this Directive should do so in accordance with pertinent rules and regulations promulgated by the Board of Pharmacy and DEA.

The **Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine** has authority to regulate the practice of veterinary medicine. Persons euthanizing animals under this Directive should abide by all pertinent rules and regulations promulgated by the Board of Veterinary Medicine.

Section 2: EUTHANASIA OF COMPANION ANIMALS

Subsection A: ELIGIBILITY FOR EUTHANASIA OF COMPANION ANIMALS

Euthanasia of companion animals is considered a veterinary procedure, and under most circumstances can only be performed by or under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian. The Comprehensive Animal Care Laws allow prescribed circumstances under which euthanasia can be performed by other persons acting in accordance with this Directive.

These circumstances are:

- A companion animal in the custody of a local jurisdiction or animal shelter which has exceeded its mandated holding period;
- A companion animal which has been properly surrendered to a local jurisdiction animal shelter by its lawful owner;
- A companion animal in the custody of a local jurisdiction or animal shelter which is critically injured, critically ill, or unweaned; and
- A dog or cat showing active signs of rabies or suspected of having rabies, for which confinement is impossible or impracticable.

Subsection B: METHODS FOR EUTHANASIA OF COMPANION ANIMALS

Euthanasia must be performed by a person who is both **trained** and **certified** in accordance with this Directive. Euthanasia must be performed in a manner that is humane, and minimizes animal suffering and distress. The approved method for routine and emergency companion animal euthanasia is euthanasia by injection. In very limited circumstances, euthanasia by firearm is also approved. Animals for which euthanasia cannot be readily carried out in a skillful, proficient, and humane manner must be referred to a licensed veterinarian.

Euthanasia of companion animals by carbon monoxide or other gas chambers is prohibited.

Euthanasia of companion animals by firearm is only allowed in very limited situations involving animals presumed to be rabid.

Method I. Routine and Emergency Euthanasia by Sodium Pentobarbital Injection

Sodium pentobarbital injection is approved for routine and emergency companion animal euthanasia when used in accordance with the general requirements, equipment and supplies, and administration guidelines detailed below. Oral administration of sodium pentobarbital is not approved under any circumstances.

1. **General Requirements**

   - **Training** – An individual must complete a VDACS approved Humane Euthanasia course prior to becoming certified to perform sodium pentobarbital euthanasia. **Form AC4**, the ***Animal Euthanasia Training Record***, must be completed and signed by the course instructor, and kept on file at the animal facility where the individual performs euthanasia as a matter of public record.

- **Certification** – Prior to performing euthanasia, an individual must be certified as having a level of competency conducive to the proficient and humane performance of euthanasia. Competency must be demonstrated to a veterinarian with a current Virginia license. The individual must demonstrate:
    1. Familiarity with the contents of this Directive;
    2. Ability to properly handle and restrain each species for which euthanasia is to be performed;
    3. Ability to correctly identify drug names and concentrations;
    4. Ability to calculate dosage amounts;
    5. Ability to locate proper injection sites; and
    6. Ability to skillfully perform each type of injection.

  The veterinarian must assess a demonstration of competency, which must be certified using **Form AC5,** the ***Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia***. This certification must be kept on file at the animal facility where the individual performs euthanasia as a matter of public record. **This demonstration of competency and certification on Form AC5 must be renewed every three years.**

- **Supervision** – Individuals performing euthanasia must do so in accordance with **Form AC6,** the ***Veterinary Supervision and Euthanasia Protocol***, for the facility with which they are affiliated. All other verbal or written guidance from the supervising veterinarian must also be followed.

  A veterinarian, with a current license to practice in Virginia, must be designated as the supervising veterinarian for each facility in which euthanasia is performed. The supervising veterinarian is expected to provide general oversight of euthanasia through orientation, guidance, instruction, and periodic monitoring of euthanasia activities and supplies. The supervising veterinarian must establish a euthanasia protocol for the facility in compliance with this Directive and all pertinent state and federal laws and regulations.

  The euthanasia protocol must identify the procedures to be followed in conducting euthanasia and the specific drugs and corresponding dosages authorized for use at the facility. **Form AC6,** the ***Veterinary Supervision and Euthanasia Protocol***, must be completed and kept on file at the animal facility as a matter of public record. In the event of a change of supervising veterinarian, the Protocol must be reevaluated and signed by the new supervising veterinarian.

  It is the responsibility of each facility conducting euthanasia to ensure that they have a current and appropriate relationship with a supervising veterinarian. The responsibilities of the supervising veterinarian under this Directive are complimentary to but separate and distinct from those mandated by the Board of Pharmacy or other state or federal agencies.

  Supervising veterinarians may suspend the ***Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia*** for any individual conducting euthanasia under their protocol if the individual is not conducting euthanasia in a skillful, proficient, or humane manner or in accordance with the protocol. Such suspension shall

be communicated in writing to the State Veterinarian's Office. This communication shall contain the rationale for suspension, and the supervising veterinarian's recommendation for further action. Upon due consideration, the State Veterinarian's Office may also revoke the ***Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia*** or require further training.

2. Equipment and Supplies

- **Scale** – Each facility conducting euthanasia is recommended to have a scale in order to obtain an accurate weight on each animal prior to administration of sodium pentobarbital.

- **Needles and Syringes** – The proper size of syringe and needle must be used for each animal. The syringe must be capable of accurately measuring and containing the volume of drug required for proper dosing. Needles must be sharp for minimizing pain of injection; therefore, a brand new needle must be used for each animal. The following is a guideline for needle selection:

Type of Animal	Needle Size, IV	Needle Size, IP or IC
Kittens	23g or smaller*	23g x ¾"*
Adult Cats	23 gauge*	22g x 1"
Puppies <20 lbs	23 gauge*	22g x 1"
Dogs, 20 – 40 lbs.	22 gauge	20g x 1"
Dogs, > 40 lbs.	20 gauge	18g x 1 ½"
Other	As directed by supervising veterinarian	

* Please note that it may not be possible to administer sodium pentobarbital through a 23g needle. In these cases, the supervising veterinarian should be consulted in order to determine an appropriate protocol.

3. Drug Administration

Immediately before euthanasia the animal custody record must be reviewed to verify identity of the animal and eligibility for euthanasia. Immediately following euthanasia the date, method of euthanasia, and identity of the individual performing euthanasia must be recorded on the animal custody record. Sodium pentobarbital must be obtained in a liquid form that is ready to use and has a concentration of at least 5 grains/cc (324 mg/ml). The formulation can be with or without lidocaine. The dosage must be determined in accordance with label instructions or as directed by the supervising veterinarian. The animal must be humanely restrained and not subject to undue stress. The following routes of administration are approved:

- **Intravenous (IV)** – The drug is humanely injected directly into a vein. A readily accessible and appropriate vein must be identified.

- **Intraperitoneal (IP)** – The drug is humanely injected into the peritoneal cavity. The injection should be made behind the umbilicus and on the abdominal midline. This route results in gradual absorption of the drug,

causing a progressive effect of sedation and anesthesia until death ultimately occurs. The animal must be placed in a safe, quiet, secure, comfortable area after initial administration of the drug, and monitored closely to prevent stress and possible injury due to stumbling or falling while the drug takes effect. Euthanasia by this method can take 30 minutes or more, and a follow-up administration of drug may be necessary to ensure death.

- **Intracardiac (IC)** – The drug is humanely injected with a single thrust into the heart of an **anesthetized or comatose** animal in an **emergency** situation where IV or IP injection is not possible, and there are urgent circumstances necessitating immediate euthanasia for humane reasons.

Method II. Emergency Euthanasia by Firearm

The use of a firearm is approved for emergency euthanasia **only** if a dog or cat is showing active clinical signs of rabies, or is suspected of having rabies based on valid information that the animal has had contact with a known or suspected rabid animal. A firearm should be used **only** if all other methods of humane capture have failed.

The destruction of an animal posing a direct and immediate threat to public safety is not considered euthanasia. The use of a firearm in this circumstance should only be undertaken using careful professional judgment as to the immediacy of the public threat and the safety of such an action, and in accordance with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations concerning the discharge of a firearm.

The destruction of a dog in the act of killing livestock or poultry is not considered euthanasia, and should be undertaken with the same consideration detailed above.

Emergency euthanasia by firearm of a known or suspect rabid dog or cat should be undertaken in accordance with the following requirements:

1. **General Requirements**

- **Training** – An individual must complete a VDACS approved course in Euthanasia by Firearm prior to becoming certified to perform firearm euthanasia. **Form AC4**, the ***Animal Euthanasia Training Record***, must be completed and signed by the course instructor, and kept on file at the animal facility with which the individual is affiliated as a matter of public record.

- **Certification** – Prior to performing euthanasia by firearm, an individual must be certified as having a level of competency conducive to the proficient and humane performance of firearm euthanasia. Competency must be demonstrated to a veterinarian with a current Virginia license. The individual must demonstrate a familiarity with the contents of this Directive, and the ability to correctly locate the proper site for bullet placement in order to humanely and instantaneously euthanize. The veterinarian must assess a demonstration of competency (a target may be utilized), which must be certified using **Form AC5**, the ***Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia***. This certification must be kept on file at the animal facility with which the individual is affiliated as a matter of public record. **This**

demonstration of competency and certification on Form AC5 must be renewed every three years.

- **Firearms Qualification** – Individuals utilizing a firearm under the provisions of this Directive must possess an official firearms qualification, for the specific type of firearm to be used, issued by the rangemaster or firearms instructor authorized by the local governing body. A copy of this qualification must be attached to all copies of **Form AC5** for individuals performing euthanasia by firearm.

2. **Placement of Projectile**

- Because this method is only approved for dogs and cats showing active clinical signs of rabies (or suspected of having rabies), the bullet must be placed directly into the heart of the animal so that the brain remains intact for laboratory testing.

Method III. Euthanasia by a Licensed Veterinarian

A veterinarian with a current Virginia license may perform euthanasia on animals utilizing any method recognized as humane by the American Veterinary Medical Association as published in the most current version of the ***AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia.***

Subsection C: HUMANE HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

Basic Considerations

Euthanasia by sodium pentobarbital Injection involves direct handling and restraint of the animal in order to carry out the procedure. Restraint is required in order to ensure that euthanasia is conducted in a humane and proficient manner. No animal should be euthanized unless adequate and humane restraint can be ensured.

Restraint Procedures

The animal may be restrained by manual, mechanical or chemical means. Chemical restraint, or sedation, may only be conducted in accordance with the protocol established by the supervising veterinarian for the facility.

- **Manual Restraint** – Restraint provided by another person that holds and positions the animal in a comfortable, safe, and secure manner that presents the injection site for efficient administration of the drug. Manual restraint must be accomplished without causing the animal stress or discomfort and under safe conditions for the handlers.

- **Mechanical Restraint** – Restraint provided by commercially available equipment designed specifically for the humane handling and restraint of animals in order to effect full immobilization. Equipment that restrains an animal at only one point (such as a muzzle and lead or catch pole) is not sufficient mechanical restraint. The equipment must be used and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

- **Chemical Restraint** – Restraint provided by the administration of one of the following sedatives, in accordance with label instructions and supervising veterinarian's protocol, is approved for use as follows:

Prior to IV, IP, or IC Sodium Pentobarbital Injection		
Drug Name	Species*	Route of Administration
tiletamine-zolazepam (Telazol)	dog, cat	intramuscular
xylazine hydrochloride and ketamine hydrochloride	dog, cat	intramuscular (simultaneous administration of both drugs)
dexmedetomidine hydrochloride (Dexdomitor)	dog, cat	intramuscular

Prior to IV or IP Sodium Pentobarbital Injection		
Drug Name	Species*	Route of Administration
acepromazine maleate	dog, cat	intramuscular subcutaneous oral
xylazine hydrochloride	dog, cat	intramuscular
dexmedetomidine hydrochloride (Dexdomitor)	dog, cat	intramuscular
xylazine hydrochloride	dog less than 50 lbs.	intramuscular subcutaneous
ketamine hydrochloride	cat	intramuscular

* The supervising veterinarian may indicate additional species on the ***Veterinary Supervision and Euthanasia Protocol***

Subsection D: POSITIVE DETERMINATION OF DEATH

After euthanasia is performed by any method, it is crucial to make a positive determination of death before carcass disposal. The determination of death should be made following a thorough examination of the animal, repeated at least twice at suitable intervals following the act of euthanasia. A stethoscope is required to make a positive determination of death. **All eight** of the following assessments must be made on each animal that has been euthanized in order to positively determine the death of an animal:

1. **Lack of Heartbeat—Stethoscope:** No audible heartbeat is heard through the stethoscope.
2. **Lack of Heartbeat—Palpation:** No heartbeat is felt through thoracic palpation; no pulses are felt on extremities.
3. **Lack of Respiration—Stethoscope:** No audible breathing is heard through the stethoscope.
4. **Lack of Respiration—Palpation:** No breathing is felt on palpation.
5. **Lack of Respiration—Visual:** No visible chest movements are observed.
6. **Lack of Corneal Reflex:** No blinking occurs when the eye is touched.
7. **Lack of Toe-Pinch Reflex:** No withdrawal reflex occurs when the skin between the toes is **forcibly** pinched.
8. **Lack of Capillary Refill:** Mucous membranes remain blanched after applying pressure.

All eight of these assessments **must** be repeated an additional time five minutes later to ensure positive determination of death prior to carcass disposal.

Section 3: EUTHANASIA OF AGRICULTURAL ANIMALS

Euthanasia of agricultural animals is authorized under this Directive. Supervising veterinarians may certify individuals to euthanize agricultural animals on **Form AC5**, the ***Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia***. Individuals may euthanize agricultural animals only if certified. Approved methods of both routine and emergency euthanasia for agricultural animals are euthanasia by injection and firearm including captive bolt. Euthanasia by firearm should be by bullet or bolt delivery to the brain (if the agricultural animal is suspected of being rabid, bullet delivery should be to the heart).

Agricultural animals should only be euthanized after consultation with the supervising veterinarian regarding the appropriate method of euthanasia, determination of death, and carcass disposal every time an agricultural animal is euthanized, unless otherwise directed by the supervising veterinarian. In cases of euthanasia by injection the carcass is not fit for human or animal consumption and must be disposed of in a manner that prohibits scavenging and is in accordance with all pertinent laws, regulations, and ordinances.

Consult with the State Veterinarian's Office before any mass euthanasia of agricultural animals is initiated.

Section 4: THE FACILITY SUPERVISING VETERINARIAN'S ROLE

A veterinarian, with a current license to practice in Virginia, must be designated as the supervising veterinarian for each facility in which euthanasia is performed. It is the responsibility of each facility conducting euthanasia to ensure that they have a current and appropriate relationship with a supervising veterinarian. The responsibilities of the supervising veterinarian under this Directive are complementary to but separate and distinct from those mandated by other state or federal agencies.

The supervising veterinarian is expected to provide general oversight of euthanasia through orientation, guidance, instruction, and periodic monitoring of euthanasia activities and supplies. The supervising veterinarian must establish a euthanasia protocol for the facility in compliance with this Directive and all pertinent state and federal laws and regulations.

The euthanasia protocol must identify the procedures to be followed in conducting euthanasia and the specific drugs and corresponding dosages authorized for use at that facility. **Form AC6**, the ***Veterinary Supervision and Euthanasia Protocol***, must be completed and kept on file at the animal facility as a matter of public record. In the event of a change of supervising veterinarian, the Protocol must be reevaluated and signed by the new supervising veterinarian.

Supervising veterinarians may suspend the ***Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia*** for any individual conducting euthanasia under their protocol if the individual is not conducting euthanasia in a skillful, proficient, or humane manner or in accordance with the protocol. Such suspension shall be communicated in writing to the State Veterinarian's Office. This communication shall contain the rationale for suspension, and the supervising veterinarian's recommendation for further action.

If a facility does not have a supervising veterinarian individuals affiliated with it, regardless of certification, may not perform euthanasia.

Section 5: DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS

State Veterinarian's Directive 79-1
A copy of this Directive must be maintained in a conspicuous and accessible manner at each facility excepting veterinary establishments where euthanasia is performed in accordance with this Directive. All forms and associated documents are subject to public inspection, and should be readily accessible within the facility.

Copies Do Not Need to Be Routinely Provided to the State Veterinarian's Office
Euthanasia training, certification, and protocol forms do not need to be provided to the State Veterinarian's Office on a routine basis. Upon request, copies of documents should be mailed to the State Veterinarian's Office at the following address:

Office of Veterinary Services
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
PO Box 1163
Richmond, VA 23218

Section 6: SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Office of Veterinary Services
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
The State Veterinarian has designated the Office of Veterinary Services to oversee this Directive. For questions about the information contained in this Directive, the Office of Veterinary Services can be contacted at:

Phone: (804) 786-2483
Fax: (804) 371-2380
Website: http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/animals/index.shtml

Board of Pharmacy
Virginia Department of Health Professions
The Board of Pharmacy regulates the distribution and handling of veterinary drugs to facilities that use them to euthanize animals. Any questions relating to the registration process for receiving drugs, the procurement of drugs, or the handling of drugs should be directed to the Board of Pharmacy at:

Phone: (804) 367-4456
Fax: (804) 527-4472
Website: http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/Pharmacy

US Drug Enforcement Agency
Authorization to receive and handle controlled veterinary drugs must also be received from the Drug Enforcement Agency. Questions concerning this process should be directed to the DEA at:

Phone: (800) 882-9539
Website: http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
The State Veterinarian has designated the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) to authorize the euthanasia of wildlife and methods by which it is done. Questions concerning the euthanasia of wildlife should be directed to the DGIF at:

Phone: (804) 367-1000
Fax: (804) 367-9147
Website: http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife

Reviewed and approved this 17th day of August, 2009.

Richard L. Wilkes, DVM
State Veterinarian

AC4	Animal Euthanasia Training Record	
METHOD OF EUTHANASIA		Sodium Pentobarbital Injection (8 hours)
		Firearms (2 hours)
TRAINEE NAME		
TRAINEE TITLE		
TRAINEE EMPLOYER		
TRAINEE FACILITY (Name, Address, Phone #, Fax #, Email)		
TRAINING PROVIDER (Name, Address, Phone #, Fax #, Email)		
TRAINING COURSE TITLE		
TRAINING COURSE DATE AND TIME		
INSTRUCTOR (Printed Name)		
Date		Instructor Signature

Approval of training courses by must be obtained in writing from the State Veterinarian's Office using the designated format and/or forms applicable to Training Course Approval.

AC5	**Competency Certification for Animal Euthanasia** *Check each box for which competency has been demonstrated*
Part 1 ***Must be completed for all individuals performing animal euthanasia***	
Name and Title	
Facility	
Directive 79-1	☐ This individual has demonstrated competency in understanding and applying State Veterinarian's Directive 79-1, Methods Prescribed or Approved for Animal Euthanasia
Positive Determination of Death	This individual has demonstrated competency in understanding and applying the following methods of determination of death: ☐ Lack of Heartbeat, Stethoscope ☐ Lack of Respiration, Visual ☐ Lack of Heartbeat, Palpation ☐ Lack of Corneal Reflex ☐ Lack of Respiration, Stethoscope ☐ Lack of Toe-Pinch Reflex ☐ Lack of Respiration, Palpation ☐ Lack of Capillary Refill
Part 2 ***Must be completed for all individuals performing euthanasia by injection***	
Humane Handling and Restraint *At least one box must be checked*	☐ This individual has demonstrated competency in manual restraint ☐ This individual has demonstrated competency in mechanical restraint ☐ This individual has demonstrated competency in chemical restraint
Drug Concentration, Dosing, and Handling	☐ This individual can determine drug concentrations ☐ This individual can determine appropriate drug dosages ☐ This individual can determine appropriate needle length and gauges ☐ This individual can assemble and handle needles and syringes
Routes of Administration *Check demonstrated routes*	☐ IV Jugular ☐ Oral ☐ IV Cephalic ☐ Intramuscular ☐ IV Saphenous ☐ Intraperitoneal ☐ IV Femoral ☐ Intracardiac (understands limitations)
Species *All of the above marked skills can be competently applied in the euthanasia of:*	☐ Dogs ☐ Cats ☐ Other Animals (list):_____
Part 3 ***Must be completed for all individuals performing euthanasia by firearm***	
Firearms Qualification	☐ This individual has displayed a current firearms qualification
Companion Animal	☐ This individual understands the very limited situations involving suspect rabid dogs and cats in which a firearm can be used to euthanize companion animals, and has demonstrated competency in bullet delivery to the heart
Agricultural Animal	☐ This individual has demonstrated a clear understanding of bullet or bolt placement in the brain of agricultural animals in order to effect instant and humane euthanasia
Name of Certifying Veterinarian:	
_____ **Date**	_____ **Veterinarian's Signature**

Original must be on file at the animal facility with which the individual is currently affiliated.

AC6	**Veterinary Supervision and Protocol for Animal Euthanasia** ***Attach additional sheets as necessary if more space is required***		
FACILITY (Name, Address, Phone #, Fax #, Email)			
SUPERVISING VETERINARIAN (Name, Address, Phone #, Fax #, Email)			
METHOD OF EUTHANASIA	☐ Sodium Pentobarbital Injection	☐ Firearm (**Individuals performing emergency firearm euthanasia must be properly certified**)	
Specific Instructions ***Indicate where and how euthanasia is to be performed and that positive determination of death is required***			
METHOD(S) OF RESTRAINT	☐ Manual	☐ Mechanical	☐ Chemical (Sedative) ❒ All Animals ❒ As Instructed Below
Specific Instructions ***Indicate in what species and circumstances available methods of restraint are appropriate***			

DRUG NAME / CONCENTRATION / DOSAGE / ROUTE of ADMINISTRATION

SPECIES	Euthanasia Drug Sodium Pentobarbital Concentration:_____	Pre-Euthanasia Sedative Name: Concentration:_____	Pre-Euthanasia Sedative Name: Concentration:_____
Dog	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IP Dose: ❒ IC Dose:	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IM Dose: ❒ Oral Dose:	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IM Dose: ❒ Oral Dose:
Cat	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IP Dose: ❒ IC Dose:	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IM Dose: ❒ Oral Dose:	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IM Dose: ❒ Oral Dose:
	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IP Dose: ❒ IC Dose:	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IM Dose: ❒ Oral Dose:	❒ IV Dose: ❒ IM Dose: ❒ Oral Dose:
Cautions/ Contra-indications			

_____	_____
Date	**Supervising Veterinarian's Signature**

Original copy must be on file at animal facility.