



## Pet school? You bet, say supervisors

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Pet owners who violate relatively minor animal-related laws in unincorporated San Diego County or in Department of Animal Services contract cities will soon be able to attend the pet owner version of traffic school rather than be assessed the full fine amount.

A 5-0 San Diego County Board of Supervisors vote established the Responsible Pet Ownership program, along with an \$80 fee for attendance, effective Nov. 12.

"We think this is an innovative program," said Department of Animal Services Director Dawn Danielson.

The Responsible Pet Ownership program will be used to resolve minor animal law violations. Successful completion of the program will give the prosecutor authority to reduce or eliminate fines and to remove a conviction from a violator's record.

"It's similar to traffic school and will give prosecutors an avenue," Danielson said. "It should free up the courts."

The three-hour class would cover topics such as proper animal care, animal laws, and pet ownership responsibilities. The program is expected to be conducted at least once a month at the county's San Diego animal shelter on Gaines Street near the University of San Diego.

The Department of Animal Services would provide certification of completion to the court or prosecutor, as appropriate, while eligibility for attendance would be determined by the prosecutor.

Qualifying offenses include leash law violations, animals left unattended in cars and other minor neglect violations.

The initial fee of \$80 per attendee is expected to recover full costs for the program's operation. The Department of Animal Services will review the fee annually and recommend adjustments to the supervisors as necessary to cover costs based on average class attendance and class costs.