



Regardless of previous training, all Animal Control Officers (ACOs) employed by a municipality in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must complete training in compliance with Section 51 of Chapter 193 of the Acts of 2012. All ACOs must complete the Core Competencies Training (16 credits), and may select any combination of instructor-led, or online courses to complete a total of 30 credits in their first training year.

ACOs must complete 8 credits in year 2 and beyond. They may fulfill this requirement by completing MAF Instructor-Led or online modules; or by attending ACOAM/NACA/NEACHA and other approved trainings.

Core Competencies Training – 16 Credit Hours

Curriculum Scope and Sequence

Day 1

- **Massachusetts State Law**

ACOs Receive the Massachusetts Animal Fund “Animal Laws and Regulations in Massachusetts” handbook. The Handbook is an up to date listing and field reference guide of MA laws and regulations that ACOs commonly utilize.

Hear a brief overview on the history of animal control in Massachusetts. Learn about laws pertaining to the job of an animal control officer. Massachusetts has a variety of laws that are in place to ensure proper regulation of companion animals.

Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) Chapter 140, Sections 136A – 174F, cover the majority of authorities and responsibilities associated with the performance of the animal control officer (ACO) position. This section will give an overview of the statutes that pertain to the day-to-day functions of the ACO. Learn about recent changes in animal control laws through the passing of the Acts of 2018 (Paws II).

Learn about current animal cruelty laws in MGL Chapter 272, how to recognize cruelty, and what steps to take if animal cruelty is suspected.

Learn about the differences between service, emotional support, and therapy animals. Find out what questions can be asked, handler rights, and how to deal with common conflicts.

Find out about Animal Inspector duties, rabies regulations, and how the Department of Agricultural Resources and the Massachusetts Animal Fund can offer support.

- **Wildlife Conflicts**

While ACO duties outlined in Chapter 140 pertain to domestic animals, many ACOs are answering calls about wildlife concerns on a daily basis. With the significant public health concerns related to possible rabies exposures or other zoonotic diseases, it is essential that your agency establish an effective policy to deal with conflicts with wildlife. Learn key wildlife regulations under MGL Chapter 131 & 131A and 321 CMR 9.00.

Find out options for dealing with wildlife issues that are public safety threats and ones that are not. Learn what agencies to contact to assist in common wildlife scenarios.

* Law Quiz

At the end of Day 1’s instruction all ACOs are administered a 30 question, open resource quiz. ACOs are encouraged to work with each other and utilize all course materials to find answers to questions.

Day 2

- **Emergency Preparedness**

Learn how to prepare for a range of threats and understand ACO roles in an emergency.
Learn how to develop preparedness programs based on the community's needs, expertise, and resources.
Hear about recent emergency situations and discuss successes and lessons learned.

- **Animal Behavior and Safe Handling,**

Learn about equipment, muzzling, pursuit, territory, behavior and wildlife.
Learn how to capture and restrain an animal without hurting yourself or the animal. You must understand animal behavior to understand how to most effectively capture and handle them. If you can "outthink" an animal instead of trying to "outmuscle" it, capture will be easier.
Learn to recognize body language cues in dogs and cats.
Find out what equipment should be in every animal control officer's toolkit and how to use the equipment safely and effectively.

- **Communication and Officer Safety**

Learn about public relations, citizen contact, personnel relations, and related agencies.
Public relations are the business of creating goodwill and understanding between animal control and the public. Most people, including ACOs, mistakenly assume that the skills most important to an animal control officer relate to his or her ability to handle animals. In fact, it is the ACO's ability to appropriately handle interactions with people that frequently determine his or her success in this field. Public relations skills are an important aspect of animal control. Some public relations events are planned, such as news releases or educational programs. For these occurrences, you are able to prepare your statements in advance. Other events, such as field investigations, also have a direct impact on public relations but are not prepared in advance. In these situations, the way in which you interact with people affects how the public views animal control programs and ACOs. Your attitude, communication skills, knowledge, and preparation are all important factors.

- **Reports and Record Keeping**

Understand the importance of records and review sample forms.
Records contain the activities of animal control programs and individual ACOs. They are of utmost importance, both to be in compliance with Massachusetts laws and to aid in field investigations. Records can help increase the effectiveness and efficiency of animal control programs, keep track of daily activities, control inventory, and prove cases in court. In Massachusetts, ACOs are required to maintain records in compliance with Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 140.
Learn identification of different animals, including canines (dogs) and felines (cats). It will also help you to standardize the description (everyone in the agency will give the same description for an animal) of impounded animals for record-keeping purposes. This will help make sure that the correct action is taken with the right animal.
Learn how to write a clear and concise incident report. Find out what information should be present in every report and what information is considered subjective and should be excluded.

* Final Exam

At the end of Day2's instruction a Final Exam is administered to all ACOs. For the Final Exam ACOs watch a scenario video involving a stray dog and a bite incident. ACOs then have to create an incident report and complete an intake report and short answer questions pertaining to the case. The Exam is open resource.