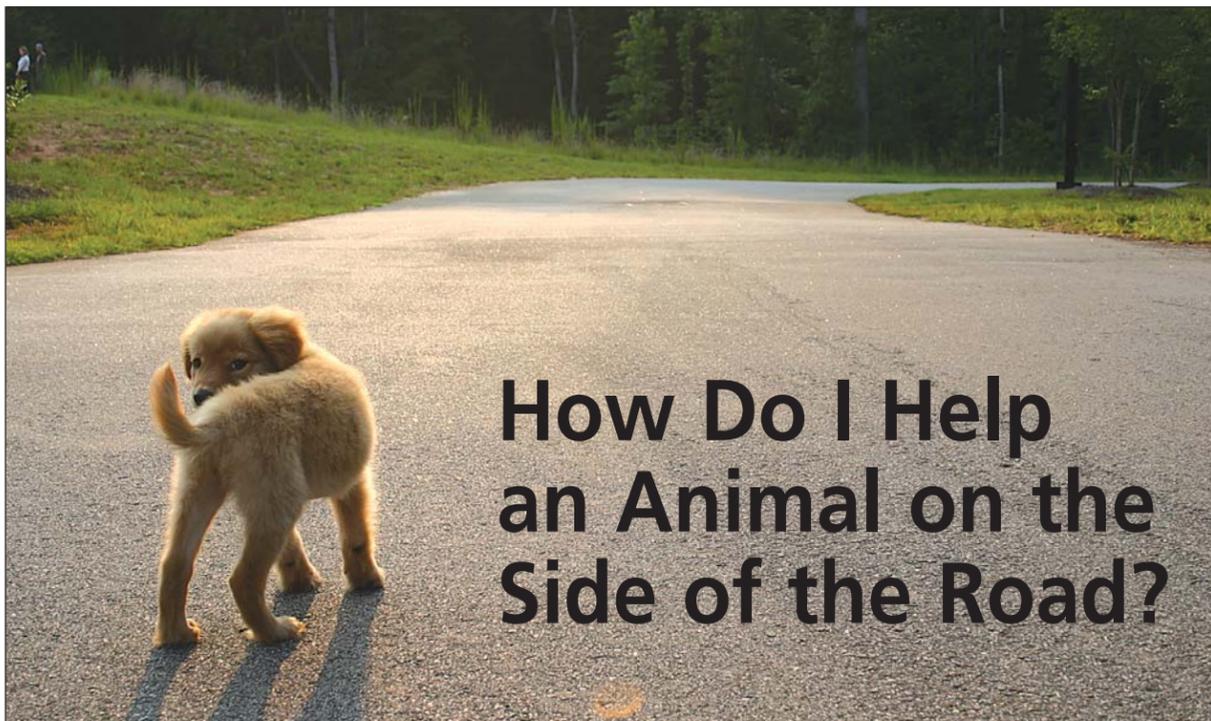


Educate Yourself

PART 3 IN THE HELPING THE PET NEXT DOOR SERIES



How Do I Help an Animal on the Side of the Road?

Pictured left: The SPCA already rescued “Gabe” a Golden Retriever mix puppy. Gabe is safe under the supervision of staff in the relative safety of the parking lot of the SPCA’s Curtis Dail Pet Adoption Center.

Would you know what to do if you saw Gabe on the side of the road? Read below to empower yourself to help the animals!

www.spcawake.org/education

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Last year my husband and I drove to Virginia to ski. As we drove up I-95, I caught sight of a dog running in the wooded, interstate median. Frantic for this dog’s safety, I hit the brakes, pulled to the side of the road, and ran across the interstate to locate the dog.

Despite our calls and searching, the dog disappeared. As we resumed our drive, I obsessed over the dog’s outcome. What if it was hit by a car? What if it was injured and needed help? What if it survived the interstate but died of starvation? What if? What if? *What if?*

Has this ever happened to you? You see an animal, alone or injured on the side of (or in) the road. Maybe it is hurt or facing imminent death or injury by a vehicle. Maybe it is lost or scared. You want to help, but how? What if your own dog or cat were standing there?

I can tell you that as much as I wanted to help that dog, I kept wondering what I would do if I had caught it. I was in a strange place. I didn’t know the number for animal control or a local veterinarian. I worried that in trying to help it that I might scare it into the road and cause the very thing that I was trying to prevent.

Here are some guidelines to help you the next time that you face this situation:

- **Personal safety comes first.** Your personal safety and that of your passengers and fellow motorists takes precedence. You won’t be able to help if you get hurt or cause an accident trying to help. Look in your rear-view mirror before braking, signal your intentions, pull your car completely off the road, turn off the ignition, set the parking brake, and put on your hazard lights.

- **Consider the safety of the animal.** A strange, frightened, and possibly sick or injured animal may behave unpredictably. A sudden move on your part, even the opening of your car door, may spook him, causing him to bolt – possibly right onto the highway. If the animal looks or acts threatening, or if for any reason you feel uneasy about the situation, remain in your car.

- **Approach slowly.** When approaching the animal, speak calmly to reassure him. Make sure he can see you at all times as you approach, and entice him to come to you by offering a strong-smelling food such as canned tuna or dried liver.

- **Call 911.** Do so whether or not the animal is injured, and whether or not he appears to be a stray or to be owned (meaning he is wearing an identification tag or flea collar or has recently been groomed). If you don’t have phone numbers for local animal control, call 911. No matter where you are, dispatch should be able to assist you. Response time may be faster if there is possible

danger to human life, such as cars swerving to avoid an animal or people endangering themselves by trying to assist the animal.

Leave your phone or beeper number with the dispatcher and try to get an estimate of how long it may take someone to respond. If possible, stay on the scene to keep an eye on the dog or cat until help arrives. Make sure you report to authorities precisely where the animal is. For example, say “one mile north of Garner on Highway 70” or “between markers 65 and 66 on Interstate 40 East.”

- **Bites (and rabies) happen.** Remember that any scared or injured animal may bite. Due to the prevalence of rabies, do not make physical contact with wild animals, especially a raccoon or fox, but do inform animal control. If you are bitten by any animal, there is a very good chance that you will have to undergo preventive treatment for rabies.

- **Restraining the animal.** You can try to lure the animal into your car with food, close the door, and wait for help. But do this only if you are certain someone will come to get the animal very soon. In most cases it is not a good idea to attempt to drive somewhere with a strange dog loose in your car; he may become frantic or defensive once you’re in the car with him. Cats may do the same, as well as lodge themselves under the car seat.

- **Emotionally prepare.** The state of the animal’s body, if they have been hit by a car, may be difficult to see. Also know that a humane death may be the most loving solution. Depending on where you are, animal control officers may be able to provide humane euthanization on the spot; most veterinarians will provide “good Samaritan” euthanasia at no charge for animals irrevocably injured.

- **Be ready to rescue.** If you are able to transport the animal, take him to the nearest animal shelter. Or, if you plan to keep the animal in the event no owner is found, notify animal control that you have the animal or that you have taken him to a veterinary hospital for treatment.

You usually can place a free “found” ad in your local newspaper, this includes the *News & Observer*. Keep a copy of the ID to prove your good intentions should any question arise later. To check on any relevant laws in your state, county, or town, contact your local animal control agency, humane society, or SPCA. Many times, the dog or cat you find along the highway will turn out to be unowned, unwanted, and unclaimed. Even so, the person finding the stray dog or cat does not automatically become the owner or keeper – as in “finders keepers” – until he has satisfied certain state and/or local requirements.

In almost every state, the animal is not “owned” by the finder until the holding period for strays (as specified by state or local laws) has expired and the finder has made an attempt to reunite the animal

TO STOP OR NOT TO STOP?

If you’re uncertain about whether or not to assist or keep an animal you see alongside the highway, here’s a final word of advice:

First, think of what you would want the finder of your animal to do if he happened to find him injured and his collar missing. You’d want him to take your pet to a veterinarian, and you’d want him to try to find you.

At the same time, be reasonable about how much you can afford to do for that animal if no owner shows up. Are you willing to add him to your household? And will you be willing to return him to his original home if the owner turns up after you’ve started to form an attachment?

Thinking these issues through in advance may stand you in good stead the next time you see that wrenching sight at the side of a road. 🐾

with his original owner and/or has taken steps – obtaining vaccinations, license, collar and identification tag – to prove he is now the owner.

The SPCA waits five days to assume ownership of a stray animal not wearing identification. The SPCA uses 30 days as the time period before pet ownership can default to the finder, assuming the finder has made every reasonable attempt to look for the lost pet’s owner.

- **Don’t assume you are dealing with an irresponsible owner.** Good Samaritans who have never lost a cherished companion animal may conclude that the owner of the found dog or cat callously abandoned him or, at the very least, neglected to keep him safely confined at home. But accidents can happen to anyone. The frantic owner may be looking everywhere for their beloved pet.

- **Understand the limitations of animal care and control agencies.** Once you have taken the initiative, time, and trouble to rescue a dog or cat along the highway, you may be surprised to find that the rest of the pet care community may not necessarily rush forward to do what you see as its part. For instance, you may take a badly injured stray dog to animal control, only to learn that the agency is unable to provide expensive surgery to treat the dog’s injuries and, to relieve him from his suffering, euthanizes him instead. A cat with relatively minor injuries may be kept for only the mandated stray holding period and then euthanized. Virtually all animal control facilities have severe budgetary or space limitations and must make painful decisions on how best to allocate resources. 🐾

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