

**Office of the City Auditor**

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**Report to the City Council  
City of San José**

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**POLICE RESPONSE TO  
ANIMAL CALLS FOR  
SERVICE**

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**Report 16-06  
June 2016**



**Office of the City Auditor**  
**Sharon W. Erickson, City Auditor**

June 9, 2016

Honorable Mayor and Members  
Of the City Council  
200 East Santa Clara Street  
San José, CA 95113

### **Police Response to Animal Calls for Service**

The Manager's Budget Addendum (MBA) #14 from FY 2015-16 requested that the Auditor's Office review police responses to animal related calls for service and to assess whether Animal Services Officers or Community Services Officers could respond to these calls instead. The MBA identified six questions which we have addressed in this report.

Animal Service Officers responded to about 21,000 animal related calls for service annually in 2014 and 2015 in San José. Police officers responded to about 330 animal related calls annually during the same time period with the majority of these being joint responses with Animal Service Officers and the Police Department. We found that Animal Care and Services and the Police Department were adequately prioritizing emergency animal related calls to ensure that the public and animals in San José are well protected.

This report does not include any recommendations. We will present this report at the June 16, 2016 meeting of the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee. We would like to thank the Public Works and Police departments for their time and insight during the audit process. The Administration has reviewed the information in this report but because there are no recommendations, no response is required.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon W. Erickson  
City Auditor

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# Introduction

The mission of the City Auditor's Office is to independently assess and report on City operations and services. The audit function is an essential element of San José's public accountability and our audit reports provide the City Council, City management, and the general public with independent and objective information regarding the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of City operations and services.

In accordance with the City Auditor's fiscal year (FY) 2015-16 Audit Work Plan, we have completed an audit of animal related calls for service in the City of San José (City). The audit was requested through a Management Budget Addendum for 2015-16 with a purpose of determining if some or all of the police officer responses to animal calls for service could be shifted to Community Service Officers (CSO) or Animal Service Officers (ASO) and to quantify what savings there might be from such a shift.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We limited our work to those areas specified in the *Audit Objective, Scope, and Methodology* section of this audit report.

We thank the Public Works and Police departments for their time, information, insight, and cooperation during the audit process.

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## Background

Animal Care and Services (ACS) is a division of the Department of Public Works within the City of San José. ACS provides many services including: operation of the City's animal shelter, veterinary services for animals brought to the shelter, low cost spay and neutering, and animal control field operations.

ACS is the primary responding agency for animal related calls for service in San José. In fiscal years 2013-14 and 2014-15, ACS responded to a total of about 50,000 calls for service. The public can contact ACS directly by calling 408-794-7297 (PAWS) or through an online report form. Generally, if the public calls 311 or 911 they will be transferred to ACS dispatch.

ACS responds to animal related calls for service in San José as well as Milpitas, Saratoga, Cupertino, and Los Gatos. Calls range from urgent, dangerous matters (such as serious animal bites and loose, vicious animals) to animal abuse, humane condition concerns, injured or dead animals, and noisy animals.

Police sworn personnel also sometimes respond to animal calls for service, but far less often than ACS. Typically, police officers respond to calls for severe injuries caused by an animal, especially calls that are so severe the victim needs to be transported to the hospital in an ambulance. Other calls that elicit a police response include loose, vicious animals in busy areas, and active animal cruelty situations.

Less than one percent of the one million 911 calls taken by Police Dispatchers each year in 2014 and 2015 were animal related incidents. The majority of these types of calls appear to have been transferred to ACS without eliciting a Police response.<sup>1</sup> We estimate that police officers were deployed on about 330 calls per year in 2014 and 2015 for animal related incidents.

### *ACS Organization and Staffing*

Animal control field operations are conducted by Animal Services Officers (ASOs), who receive extensive training in humanely managing unruly or vicious dogs and other animals, working with the public to respond to animal bites and other emergency situations, issuing code violation and court citations for infractions, conducting investigations, and testifying and presenting evidence in court. ASOs are on duty from 7am to 10pm every day of the week with one ASO available for call-back during the night. There are typically 3 or 4 ASOs on patrol during normal hours although one ASO per shift is dedicated to serving San José's contract cities.

ACS Field Operations maintains the following staffing levels:

- 5 Dispatchers
- 13 Officers (ASOs)
- 3 Sergeants (Senior ASOs)
- 1 Senior Office Specialist
- 1 Captain

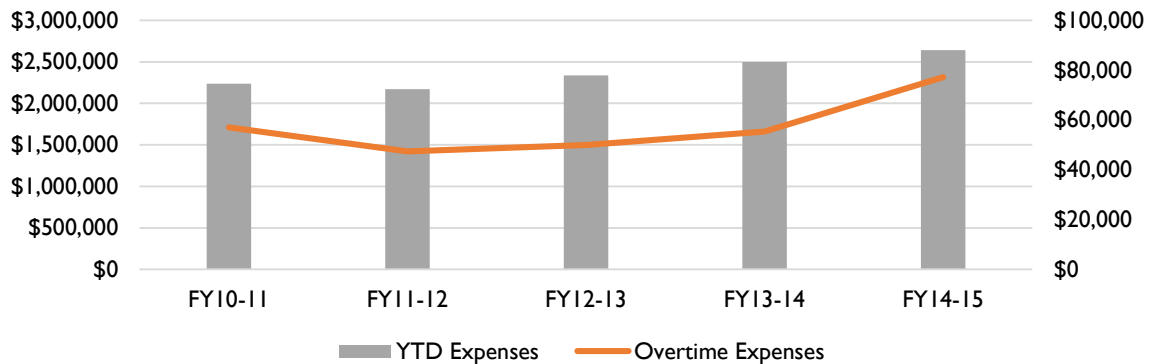
While authorized staffing has not changed dramatically over the last five years, according to staff, turnover has become a problem in their division. Since 2010, Public Works has hired 17 people for ASO positions and 10 of those people have left City employment. At the moment, 4 of the 13 ASO positions are held by new employees who are still in training (training lasts at least six months depending on the experience level of the new hire) and two ASO positions are currently vacant.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the 1,200 animal related calls in the police dispatch system, many other calls are immediately transferred to ACS dispatchers without being recorded in the police dispatch records.

In part because of turnover and low staffing levels, ACS field operations overtime usage has been rising. Overtime expenditures totaled about \$77,000 in 2014-15, a rise of 26 percent from 2010-11.

**Exhibit I: ACS Field Operations YTD Expenditures and Overtime**



Source: City's Financial Management System

## Audit Objective, Scope, and Methodology

In order to meet the objectives of our audit, we performed the following:

- We analyzed two years of Police Department animal call dispatch data to identify trends and other details including call type, time of day, time of year, and priority level.
- We analyzed two years of ACS animal call dispatch data to identify trends and other details including call type, time of day, time of year, and priority level.
- We also compared response times of joint Police Department/ACS calls to ACS-only responses to look for improvements to timeliness.
- We sampled Police dispatch data to determine the percentage of animal-related calls that actually trigger a police response. (Many calls are included in Police dispatch data that are actually forwarded to ACS with no police response or are sent out to police officers as general information for their beat.) For the calls that did trigger a response, we reviewed case notes to verify that the situation warranted a police response.
- We mapped Police and ACS animal dispatched events for CY 2014 and CY 2015, to identify the general locations and trends of these calls.
- We reviewed ACS Field Operations fiscal year expenditures including overtime through the City's Financial Management System (FMS) for the past five fiscal years.

## Police Response to Animal Calls for Service

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- We reviewed ACS Field Operations budgeted staff allocations through the Budget for the past five fiscal years.
- We interviewed police officers, a sergeant, and Police call center dispatchers and call takers to identify how or when officers respond to low priority calls and to gauge their understanding of whether ASO response times have an impact on Police resource efficiency, and to assess the viability of dispatching non-sworn classifications for some animal related calls that Police receives.
- We interviewed ASOs, the ACS Field Operations Captain, and ACS call center dispatchers and call takers to identify deployment strategies for joint responses and to assess whether the current ASO staffing level is sufficient for meeting ACS and Police timeliness targets.
- We reviewed procedures and duty manuals for ASOs, police officers, and dispatchers for Police and ACS to ensure consistency in handling call types and responding to calls.
- We reviewed salary and other compensation data to compare ASO, community service officer and police officer costs in responding to calls for service as well as ASO pay across jurisdictions.



# Finding I The Police Department and ACS Are Appropriately Prioritizing and Responding to Animal Calls

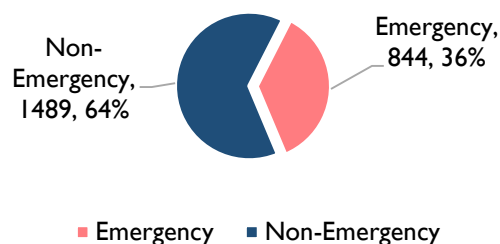
The Manager’s Budget Addendum (MBA) #14 from FY 2015-16 requested that the Auditor’s Office review police responses to animal related calls for service and to assess whether Animal Services Officers or Community Services Officers could respond to these calls instead. The MBA identified six questions which we have presented below.

## I. What types of animal related calls do the Police respond to?

In 2014 and 2015, the Police Department recorded about 1,200 calls annually for animal related services in its dispatch records, an average of about three animal related calls per day, but it appears that the majority of them, about 900 were transferred directly to ACS with no Police Department response.<sup>2</sup> We estimate that the Police Department responded to about 330 calls per year for service related to animals in 2014 and 2015.

As the exhibit below shows, most of the calls that the Police Department received fell in the non-emergency category.

**Exhibit 2: 2014 and 2015 Police Department Animal Related Dispatch Records by Emergency Status<sup>3</sup>**



Source: Police Department Animal Related Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015.

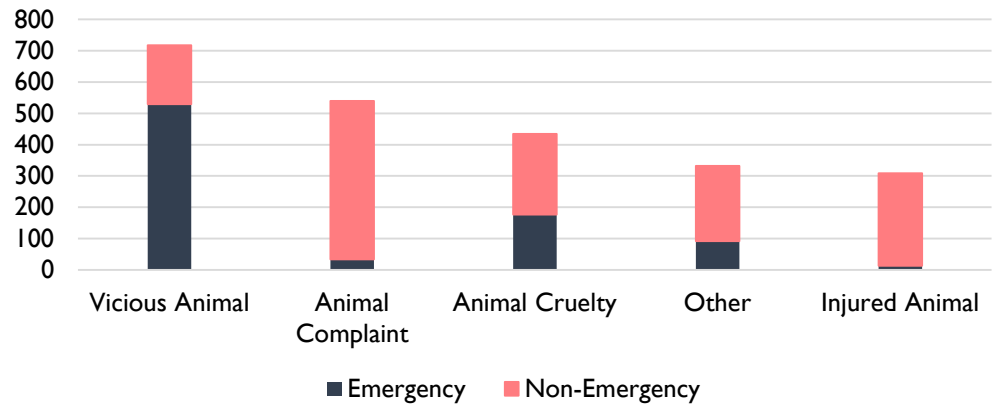
The call data is segregated into various categories as seen in the exhibit below; each call category is further segregated by the level of urgency required (priority level). The Vicious Animal category was the most common call type received by Police dispatch followed by general Animal Complaints.

<sup>2</sup> Aside from the roughly 1,200 calls that the Police Department has recorded that related to animals, there are also calls that are received through 911 that do not get recorded but are directly transferred to ACS.

<sup>3</sup> The emergency category of calls includes Priority 1 and 2, the rest of the priorities are grouped into the non-emergency category.

Most emergency calls were either related to a vicious animal or animal cruelty. Generally, animal complaints and injured or dead animals were non-emergency calls.

**Exhibit 3: 2014 and 2015 Police Department Animal Related Dispatch Records by Level of Emergency and Type**



Source: Police Department Animal Related Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015.

Through reviews of Police Department call records, interviews and “ride-alongs” with dispatchers and police officers, we believe that the Police Department is appropriately prioritizing response to animal related calls and is constantly assessing the risk of not responding while being cognizant of the limited police resources that are available at any given time.

For instance, the Police Department did not respond to calls where no apparent danger was present, but appropriately transferred those calls to ACS. On the other hand, the Police Department generally responded when there was a human criminal element in the situation, for example, a person having abandoned live puppies in a trash can outside of a home with frequent police calls.

*Joint Police Department and ACS Response*

About 225 calls per year in 2014 and 2015 are shown in dispatch records as having a joint response by both the Police Department and ACS. Roughly four out of five (79 percent) of these calls were identified as emergencies. Joint responses with the Police Department accounted for only one percent of the total animal calls that ACS receives. Many of these calls involved the police arresting someone with an animal that needed to be cared for while the owner was being arrested.

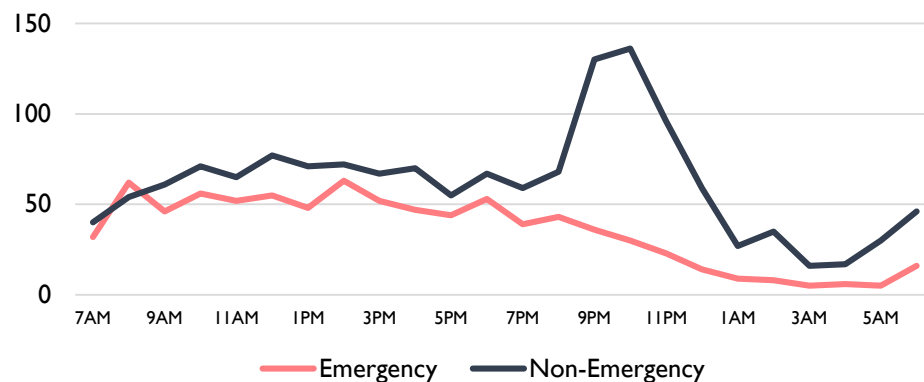
*ASO Response Times for Joint Calls with the Police Department*

In 2014 and 2015 ASOs responded to requests from the Police Department in an average of 18 minutes, with about 15 percent of calls taking more than 30 minutes for the ASO to arrive on scene. We did not identify trends in these response times by time of day or day of the week. It should be noted that ASOs responded to about 21,000 calls annually of all types in the City of San José for the calendar years 2014 and 2015; the average response time for all types of San José calls for the two year period was about 3 hours.<sup>4</sup>

**2. When do most Police responses to animal related calls occur?**

In 2014 and 2015, animal related calls peaked in the Police dispatch system data from 9pm to 11pm as the exhibit below shows – ACS dispatch operates from 7am to 9pm, which is likely the reason for increased Police dispatch calls after 9pm. Police dispatchers take animal calls when ACS dispatch is closed and either fax a report to ACS to handle non-emergency calls the next morning or call the ASO on-call for nighttime emergencies. Most after-hours calls are not emergencies. For the two calendar year periods of 2014 and 2015, the Police Department sent about 60 faxes to ACS.

**Exhibit 4: Total Police Department Animal Related Dispatch Records by Level of Emergency and Time of Day**



Source: Police Department Animal Related Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015.

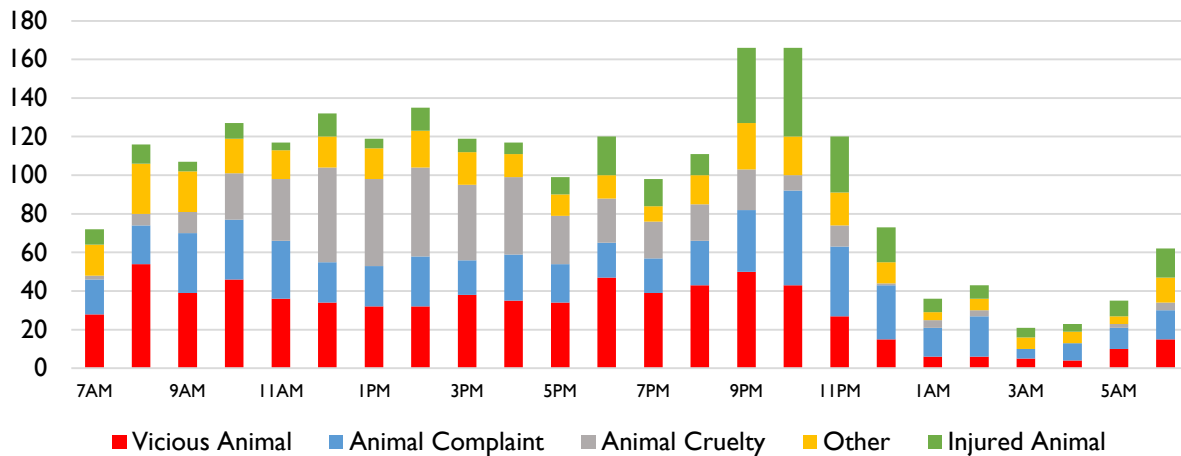
As the exhibit below shows, most of the 2014 and 2015 Police Department animal related calls in the day time were categorized as either vicious animal, animal cruelty or pertained to a general animal complaint. Injured animal calls peaked from 9 to 11pm which corresponds to the busiest time for animal calls

<sup>4</sup> The three-hour response time average excludes the 10 percent of calls which had a response time of more than one day. For those calls, about 9 percent of calls took between 1 to 20 days to respond, and about 1 percent of calls had a response time of more than 20 days. Delays in response time were typically for calls in response to dead or stray animals. Another reason for long response times is that ACS includes investigations and other long term projects in its list of “calls.”

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overall. As stated earlier, the Police Department forwarded many of these calls to ACS; police responded to only about 330 of the 1,200 annual calls in 2014 and 2015.

**Exhibit 5: 2014 and 2015 Police Department Animal Related Dispatch Records by Category and Time of Day**



Source: Police Department Animal Related Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015

### 3. How were animal related calls initiated for the Police Department?

The vast majority of the animal calls received by the Police Department were initiated by the public by calling 911 or 311. As described earlier, many of these calls were transferred to ACS. Only about four percent of Police dispatch animal related calls were initiated by police officers; such cases generally involve an officer identifying a dead animal on the road or spotting an animal related incident while out on patrol. Due to data tracking limitations, we could not identify any Police calls in 2014 or 2015 that were initiated by ASOs requesting assistance because the ASO was in danger, although that can happen.

### 4. Could ASOs or Community Service Officers respond to animal calls instead of Police Officers?

The Police Department prioritizes their calls to ensure they have sufficient staff to quickly respond to incidents where there is a potential threat to human health or safety, although they may go to a lower level call if they have a very “slow” shift or happen to be in the area. In our interviews with police officers, they spoke with high regard for ASOs and stated that they did not feel that animal calls were burdensome. They all noted that ASOs generally respond to scenes quickly and that other types of people they sometimes work with were much less responsive, especially tow truck operators. They also noted that there are several layers of prioritizing occurring which diminishes the chance that they

respond to non-emergency animal calls. Prioritization first occurs with 911 call takers and dispatchers assessing priority, then sergeants and finally police officers.

We only identified 43 calls in all of 2014 and 2015 where the Police Department responded and requested assistance from ASOs but because ASOs were unavailable or had a long estimated arrival time, the Police Department handled the call.<sup>5</sup>

One police dispatcher noted that ten years ago, when the Police Department had fewer vacancies and more officers in the field, the Police Department was able to respond to more low priority calls but that staffing shortages have resulted in a cultural shift in the Department. They expect that as staffing goes up, the Police Department may reprioritize lower priority calls again in the future.

#### *Community Service Officers Are not a Recommended Option*

Community Service Officers are not trained to handle animals and do not carry weapons. Further, this classification is more expensive than ASOs. If the City wants to add capacity for animal responses, adding funding to the ASO program is the most cost efficient option.

### **5. What are the cost differences between Police Officers and ASOs responding to animal calls for service?**

ASOs are less costly than police officers. If one assumes that the police officer or ASO is in the Tier II Pension plan, then a fully loaded top step ASO costs the City about \$38 per hour to respond to animal calls, which is almost half the cost of a police officer (\$71 per hour).<sup>6</sup> However, given the low call volume for police only animal responses, it seems unlikely that adding ASO staff would save money in this area.

### **6. Are there any trends in animal calls or responses?**

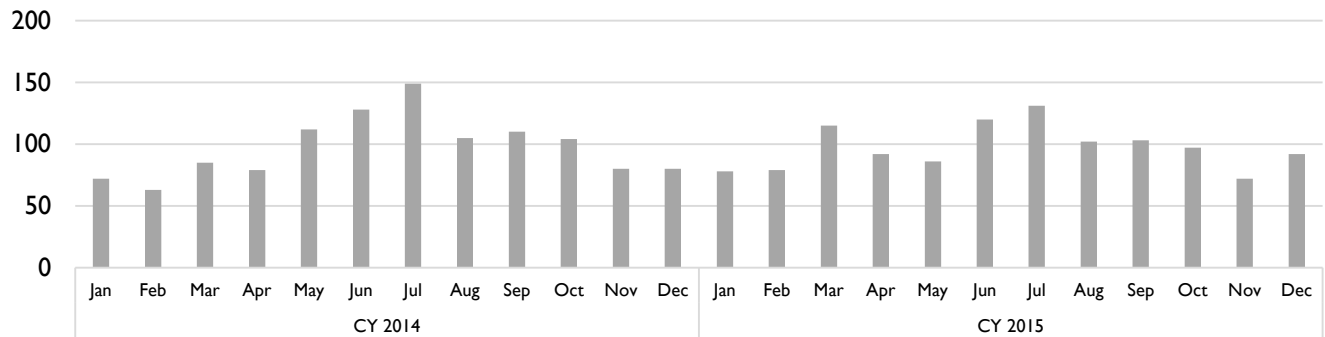
Generally, both the Police Department and ACS data from 2014 and 2015 show that animal calls increase during the summer months. The exhibit below shows the Police Department animal related calls by month over the two-year period.

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, ASOs prioritize police officer assist calls but even so, there are instances where the two or three ASOs on duty at the time are already involved in high priority calls and cannot arrive quickly.

<sup>6</sup> ASOs earn much less than police officers or Community Service Officers although they frequently face high stress or dangerous situations. ASO salaries top out at about \$55,000; Community Service Officers top out at \$77,000; and police officers at \$108,000. ASO salaries may not be competitive regionally, for example, ASOs in Sunnyvale top out at \$80,000. It may be valuable to study compensation in this classification to ensure that San José maintains high quality ASO staff with a reasonable turnover rate.

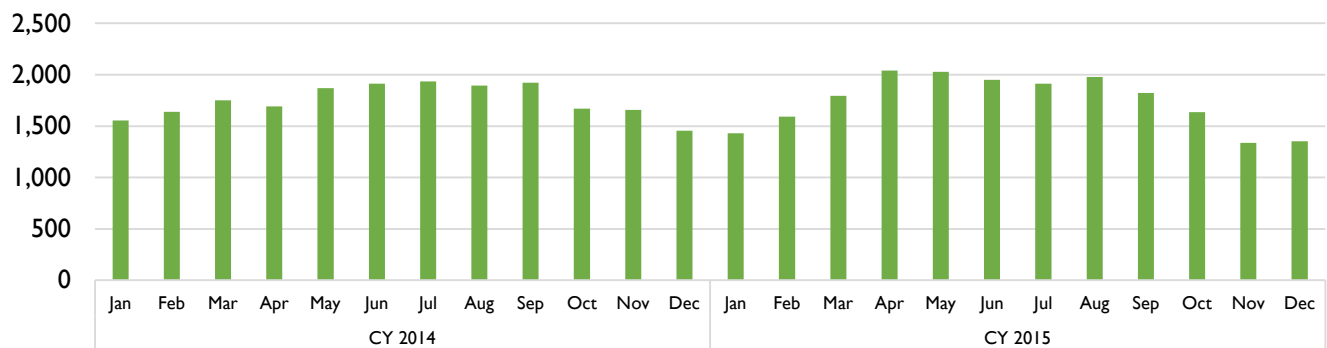
**Exhibit 6: Total Police Department Animal Related Calls by Month**



Source: Police Department Animal Related Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015.

ACS animal call data also shows a similar seasonal pattern, with the highest volume of calls being in the spring/summer months.

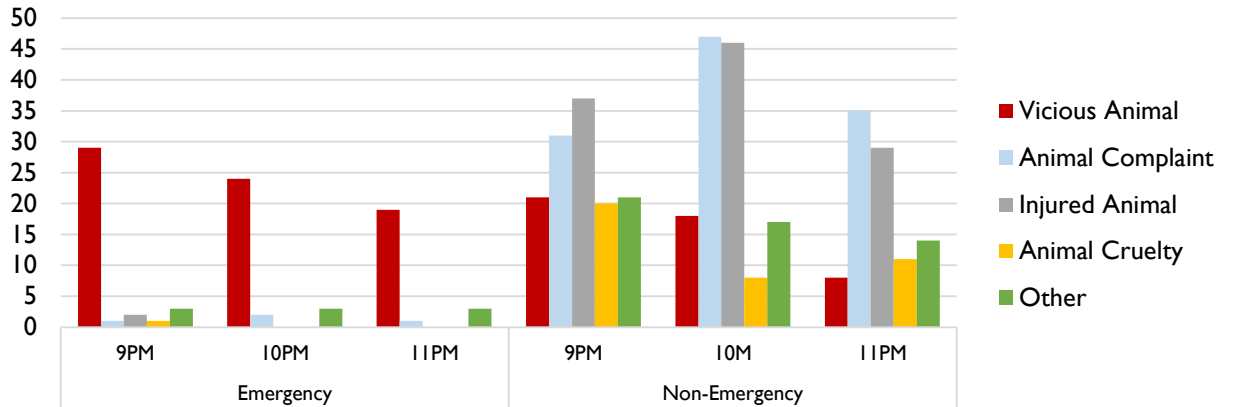
**Exhibit 7: Total ACS Animal Calls by Month**



Source: ACS Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015

We noted an increase in non-emergency calls taken by the Police Department dispatchers between 9 to 11pm when ACS dispatchers leave in 2014 and 2015; however, there are very few emergency calls requiring a police officer or ASO to respond during these hours (89 calls in 2014 and 2015 were considered emergencies which would warrant an ASO to be called back), mostly concerning a vicious animal. The rest of the calls during this time period are non-emergency calls that most often relate to animal complaints or injured animals.

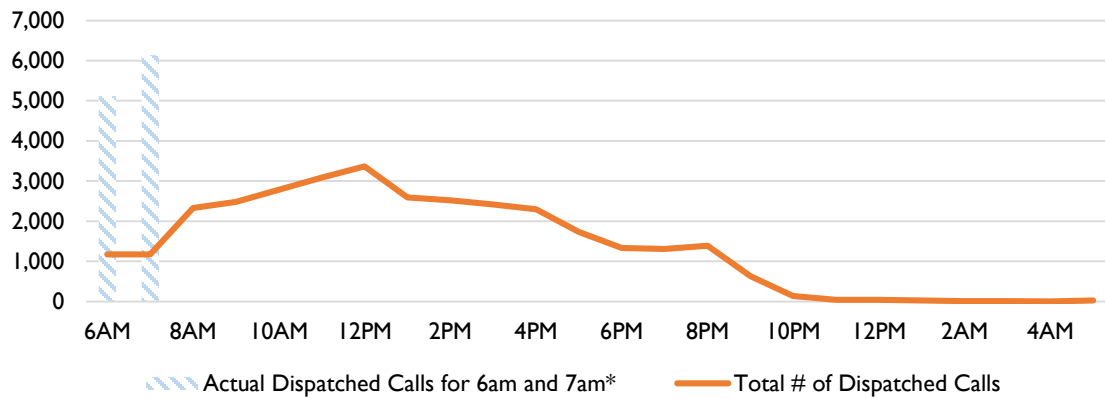
**Exhibit 8: Total Police Department Animal Related Calls from 9 to 11PM by Level of Emergency and Types of Call**



Source: Police Department Animal Related Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015.

As the graph below shows, there are very few animal-related calls at night. Dispatched calls appear to peak between 6am to 7:59am, but this is due to the fact that many low priority calls and follow-ups are set to automatically populate the dispatch queue first thing in the morning.

**Exhibit 9: Total ACS Dispatched Calls for CY 2014-2015 by Time of Day**



Source: ACS Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015.

*\*11,250 events were dispatched between 6:00 and 7:59am, however, most of these are non-emergency scheduled events set to appear at the beginning of an ASO's shift.*

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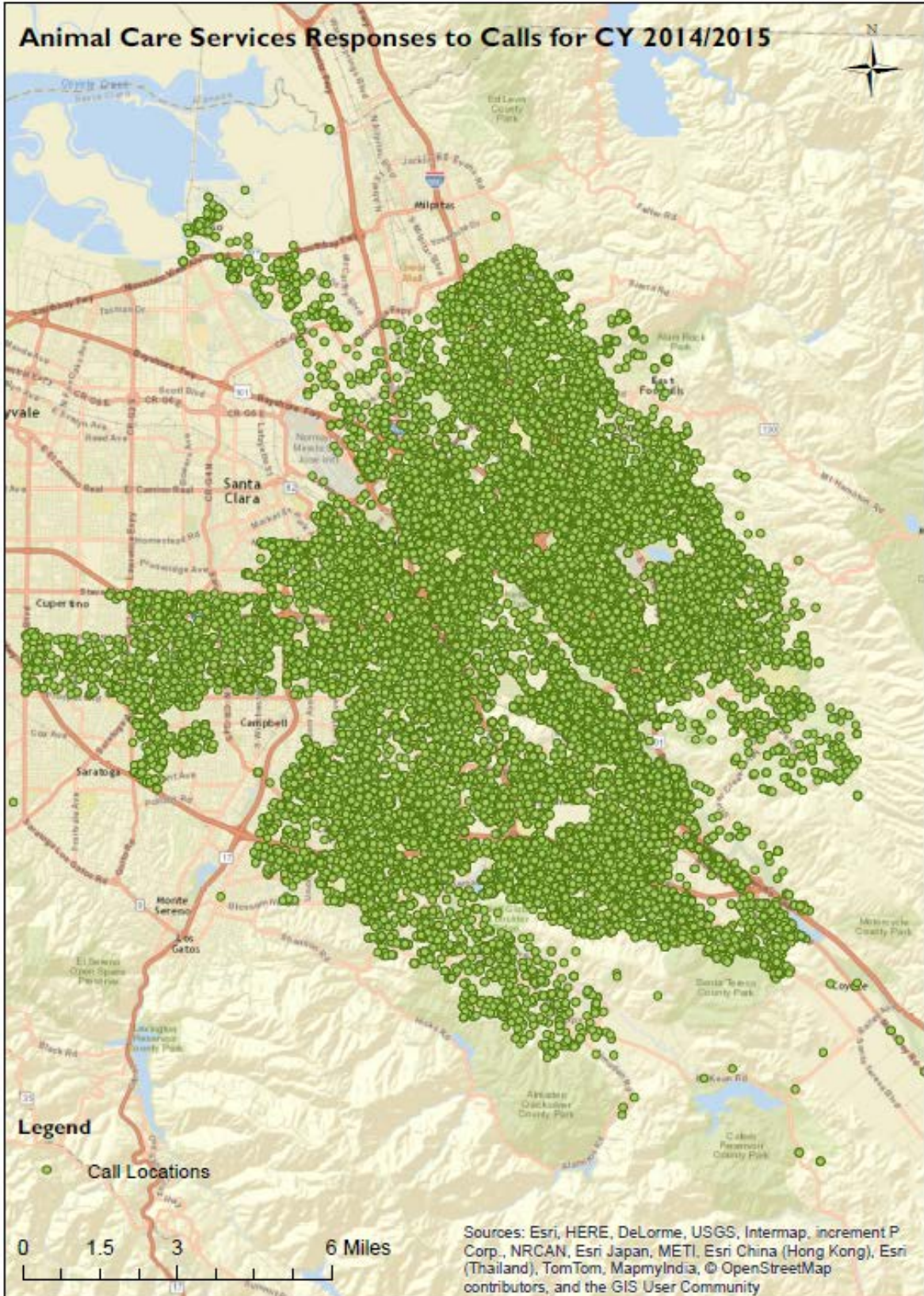


## Conclusion

Animal Service Officers responded to a total of about 50,000 animal related calls for service in fiscal years 2013-14 and 2014-15. Police officers responded to about 330 animal related calls with the majority of these being joint responses with ASOs and the Police Department. We found that ACS and the Police Department were adequately prioritizing emergency animal related calls to ensure that the public and animals in San José are well protected.

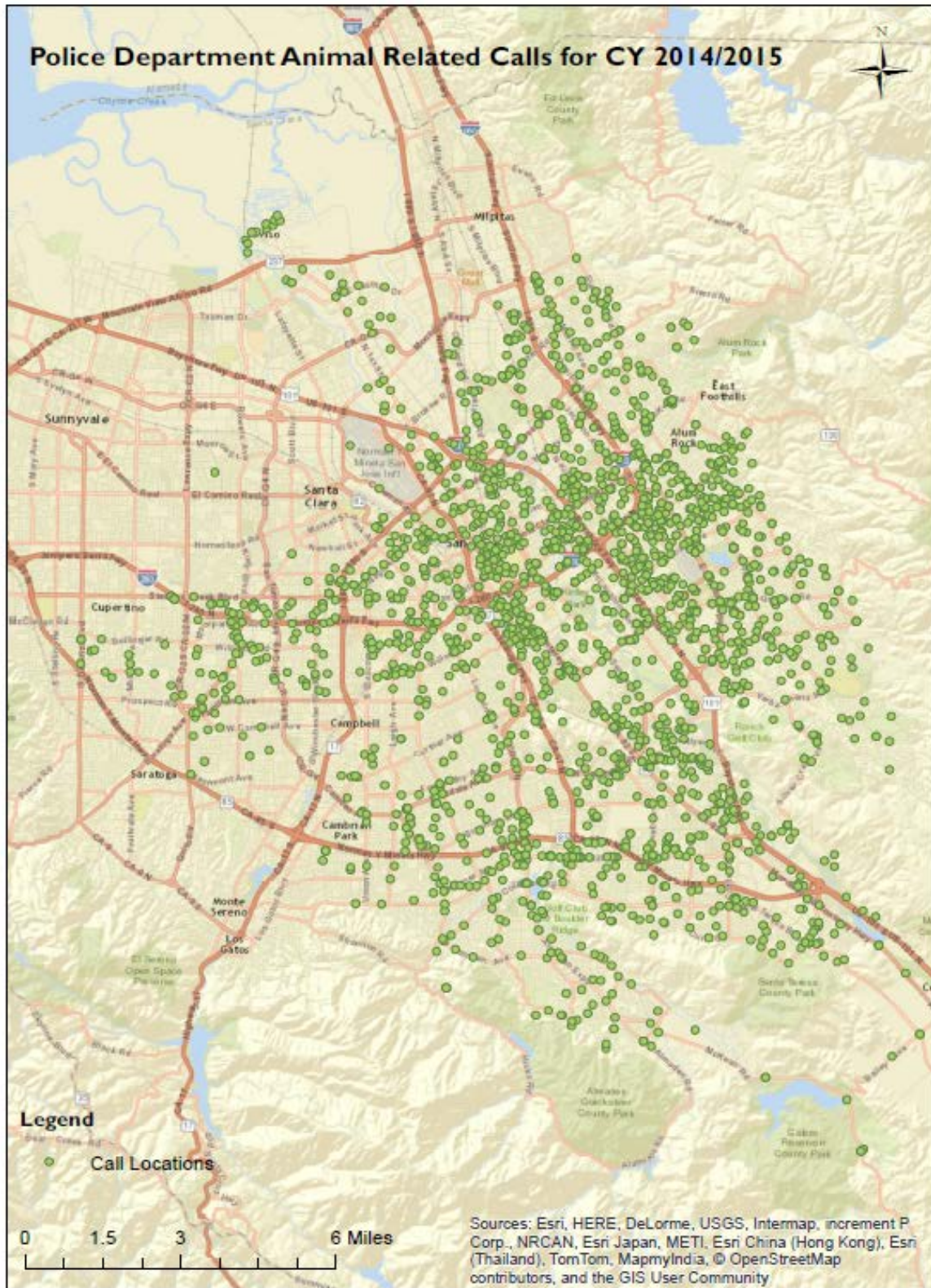
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# APPENDIX A



Source: ACS Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015. Auditor created through ArcMap. Note: the map shows about 80% of calls that ACS received, the other 20% of calls had unclear addresses that could not be geocoded.

## APPENDIX B



Source: PD Call Data for CY 2014 and 2015. Auditor created through ArcMap. Note: the map shows about 97% of calls that PD received, the other 3% of calls had unclear addresses that could not be geocoded. The PD responded to an estimated 660 of the approximately 2,400 calls shown here (or about 330 of the 1,200 annual calls).