

Animal Rights vs. Animal Welfare: Where do you stand?

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Hello, and welcome to the Saskatoon SPCA's Humane Education Blog! My name is Jasmine, and I'm the Education & Public Relations Coordinator at the Saskatoon SPCA. I have been employed at the shelter since mid-April of 2017. I love my job, and I LOVE animals!

Since I began working at the shelter, I have quickly come to realize how much information there is on the internet about animal welfare, legislation, and pet ownership. Each hot topic is accompanied by endless ideas, opinions, and criticisms – it's positively overwhelming! In an attempt to clear up any misconceptions you may have, or to fill a void of information on a topic of interest, I have decided to start this educational blog. Each month, I will be making a new entry dedicated to a popular topic in the pet and animal welfare community. These entries will be posted as downloadable PDF resources for your convenience.



My goal with this blog is to inform you of the facts surrounding the issues SPCAs and Humane Societies face every day, and to help you understand the work that we do. I invite you to email me with any questions you may have about animal welfare, legislation, and pet ownership. If you feel as though I have not addressed a topic adequately, or if you would like me to expand on an issue I've written about, I would be happy to do so! If you want me to write about an entirely new topic, I would love to hear your suggestions.

And so, without further ado, I would like to first discuss what I mean when I say "animal welfare", and how this term differs from another phrase, "animal rights". You've probably heard these terms before, but if you're like me, you may have assumed them to be interchangeable. It's important to note that these terms are not interchangeable; they are two distinct ideologies with clear differences in thought process. I would like to explain to you why the Saskatoon SPCA concerns ourselves with the "animal welfare" set of beliefs, as opposed to "animal rights".

Our Mission:

To improve quality of life for companion animals in our community through education, adoption, and the enforcement of animal welfare legislation, in a sustainable manner.

What is Animal Rights activism?

The foundational belief of animal rights activists is that the rights of animals are equivalent to the rights of humans. This means that any practices involving animals including containment, commodification, and the use of animals and their by-products for human consumption and benefit are fundamentally immoral. These beliefs are sometimes the inspiration for certain lifestyle choices such as veganism.

Organizations such as PETA, for example, fall on the side of animal rights rather than animal welfare. They tend to employ more confrontational tactics to communicate their message, such as undercover camera operations on livestock farms.

I would hesitantly explain that the animal rights movement is a more radical approach than animal welfare. As American philosopher Tom Regan once put it,

“Animal rights advocates are campaigning for no cages, while animal welfarists are campaigning for bigger cages.” – Tom Regan

As an animal welfare organization, the Saskatoon SPCA believes that humans can interact with animals in many ways, under the condition that these interactions are *humane*, minimizing any potential harm or suffering to the animals involved.

Animal Welfare

The [Canadian Veterinary Medical Association](#) defines animal welfare as *“a human responsibility that encompasses all aspects of animal wellbeing, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention, responsible care, humane handling, and, where necessary, humane euthanasia.”*

Unlike animal *rights* activists, those who advocate for animal *welfare* accept certain relationships between humans and animals as a part of life. These uses include raising animals for the purpose of consumption, owning them as pets or employing them as service animals, using animals for scientific research and education, and recreational purposes such as dog agility sports and controlled hunting. In fact, many interactions can be mutual beneficial for both people and animals – that’s why we often refer to pets as “companion animals”!

You may feel as though humane guidelines for these activities could be subjective, but I have found that animal welfare activists tend to agree on the line between humane and inhumane treatment. We measure an animal’s wellbeing by referring to a metric called “the Five Freedoms”.

The Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare

Retrieved from the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies <https://www.cfhs.ca/five-freedoms-of-animal-welfare>

The Five Freedoms is a core concept in animal welfare that originated in a UK government report in 1965 and was then refined by the Farm Animal Welfare Council. It states that an animal's primary welfare needs can be met by safeguarding the following five freedoms:



- 1) Freedom from Hunger and Thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- 2) Freedom from Discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- 3) Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- 4) Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- 5) Freedom from Fear and Distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

The concept of the Five Freedoms is an excellent way to illustrate how we as an animal welfare organization distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable living conditions for animals. As advocates of the Five Freedoms, the Saskatoon SPCA uses these measures to explain to the public what appropriate and humane treatment of animals actually looks like.

So, now that you can see the difference between animal welfare and animal rights, where do your beliefs align? The Saskatoon SPCA is dedicated to promoting animal welfare to achieve our vision of a compassionate community where all animals are valued and respected. If you would like to donate towards our work, including the enforcement of the Animal Protection Act within the City of Saskatoon, visit our online donation form: <http://www.saskatoonspca.com/supporting/donate>.

