**How do I file a complaint or report an abandoned or abused animal?** To file a complaint or report suspicion of abandonment or abuse, contact the Richland County Ombudsman’s office at 803-929-6000 or [ombudsman@richlandcountysc.gov](mailto:ombudsman@richlandcountysc.gov).

**Do I need to license my pet?** Yes, Richland County residents must obtain a license annually for their dogs and cats. Details about requirements, fees and forms can be found on the County’s [Pet Breeding and Licensing](https://richlandcountysc.gov/Government/Departments/Animal-Care/Licensing) page.

**How much does it cost to license a pet in Richland County?** Richland County’s license fee for fertile pets is $21.07 per year. The fee for spayed and neutered animals is $4.21 per year.

**Do Richland County's pet licensing fees apply to all residents?** The County’s licensing fees apply to residents in the City of Forest Acres and in the Towns of Arcadia Lakes, Blythewood, Eastover and Irmo. The City of Columbia also requires pets in its jurisdiction to be registered, but that is separate from Richland County.

**Why is pet licensing important?** There are several benefits to licensing your animal. A pet license identifies and protects your pet if they get lost, allows County staff to quickly notify owners to redeem lost pets, provides a longer care period for animals, and ensures animals are vaccinated against rabies.

**What are the fees used for?** Funds collected from pet licensing cover a portion of the cost to maintain the County’s pet ownership data base and pet recovery services.

**How much does the County receive annually from pet licensing?** Richland County has received nearly $28,000 during each of the past two fiscal years. In FY23, the County collected $27,767.81 and in FY21, funds generated totaled $27,877.76.

**How can I register my pet or receive a copy of the pet license application form?** Residents [may download or copy the pet license application form](https://richlandcountysc.gov/Portals/0/Pet%20License%20app_1.pdf), [apply online](https://etrakit.rcgov.us/etrakit/), call Richland County Animal Care at 803-576-2473 to request a form, or visit the Animal Services office at 400 Powell Road, Columbia, to purchase a license.

**Is there someone I can contact with questions about pet licensing in the County?** Yes, for questions about pet licensing, please call the County’s pet licensing specialist at 803-576-2473.

**Are there consequences for not licensing animals in Richland County?** Yes, failure to license a cat or dog is a misdemeanor. Residents can be fined $500 and/or receive up to 30 days in jail for each animal that is unlicensed.

**Where can I find more information about pet licensing and other animal services provided by Richland County?** Residents can learn more about pet licensing and other animal services [on Richland County’s Animal Services webpage](https://richlandcountysc.gov/Government/Departments/Animal-Care/Licensing) or by calling 803-576-2473.

**Will Animal Services remove animals and other wildlife from my home or property?** Domestic cats and dogs can be removed by animal care officers, except for those animals located in attics, under structures and in trees. For other wildlife removal assistance, please refer to the [S.C. Department of Natural Resources.](https://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/nuisance.html)

**My pet has died. Will Animal Services dispose of the animal?** Animal Services will dispose of personal pets (dogs or cats). It is the pet owner’s responsibility to dispose of pets that have started to decompose. The owner must place the pet in a double garbage bag and leave it visible for removal. All other animal removals are the responsibility of the homeowner.

**Can I surrender my pet to Animal Services, and is there a fee?** Residents who want to surrender their pets should contact [City of Columbia Animal Services.](https://animalservices.columbiasc.gov/surrender/)

**How many animals can I own?** In Richland County, there is no limit to the number of animals a resident can own; however, all animals must be maintained in a safe and humane environment, and in a manner that does not contribute to a nuisance in the community. Each pet must be licensed with the County. The penalty in Richland County for unlicensed dogs or cats is $500.

**What should I do if I suspect an animal or my pet has rabies, and how do I report a bite?** Suspected rabies in animals or pets should be reported to the [S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC)](https://scdhec.gov/health/diseases-conditions/insect-or-animal-borne-disease/rabies). Individuals who have been bitten or scratched by an animal with rabies or suspected of having rabies should contact their healthcare provider first. Healthcare providers are required by law to report bites to DHEC.

**What should I do to protect my pet during a hurricane or other potential natural disaster?** Owners should take several steps to protect animals before, during and after a natural disaster. More information on preparing your pets for emergencies can be found [here](https://www.scemd.org/prepare/your-emergency-plan/pet-planning/).