

Wisconsin's dog seller law is a year old and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) says dog lovers can rest a little easier knowing the state is doing what it can to ensure puppies and dogs are bred and sold here with the best interest of the pooch and the purchaser in mind.

"We've taken a great first step this year toward protecting the welfare of dogs in Wisconsin," said Dr. Yvonne Bellay, humane animal programs leader for DATCP's Division of Animal Health.

The law requires inspection and licensing of facilities that sell or adopt more than 25 dogs from more than three litters in a year. It also prohibits selling puppies less than 7 weeks old unless they go with their mothers, and requires that certificates of veterinary inspection, or health certificates, accompany dogs that are sold or adopted for a fee.

The Dog Seller Advisory Committee, meeting this summer for a first-year review as required by statute, determined the program is functioning as intended and recommended no major changes. The committee is comprised of breeders, sellers, veterinarians and representatives from sporting associations, humane societies, rescue groups and animal control facilities.

In the first year, DATCP has inspected 339 breeders, dealers and sellers. Of those, 289 have successfully earned a state license. Thirty-five have been issued conditional licenses pending correction of problematic issues, such as sanitation or appropriate record keeping and will be re-inspected. Three license applications have been denied and the remaining cases involved facilities that either went out of business or voluntarily reduced the number of dogs sold and no longer needed to have a license.

"We are happy with the progress we've made this year to inspect and license dog breeders, dealers and sellers, which also includes shelters and rescues. But our work is certainly not done yet," Bellay says.

Bellay and the staff at the Division of Animal Health work diligently to research potential licensees by monitoring popular sales venues including newspapers and the Internet. Licensed

sellers are required to print their license number in any advertising, either print or electronic, which makes it easier to identify those that may not be in compliance with the law.

“We believe there are many more breeders, dealers and sellers that are unaware of the new requirements and we are taking steps to provide necessary outreach to those people,” Bellay says.

The inspection process evaluates a facility based on its performance in seven areas, all of which have an impact on the health of the dogs being kept or bred there. Inspectors evaluate record keeping, certificates of veterinary inspection or health certificates, age that dogs are sold, general care including exercise and socialization, conditions of indoor and outdoor enclosures, and transportation of dogs.

“Most of the inspection points reflect what we consider to be common-sense aspects of dog breeding; things that most professional dog sellers should already engage in,” Bellay says.

The department intends to involve the public in assisting with the identification of potential licensees through the launch of a public awareness campaign this fall in conjunction with National Animal Safety and Protection Month. The idea behind the campaign is to encourage consumers, veterinary professionals and tradespersons to play an active role in identifying and reporting unlicensed dog sellers and facilities. Ultimately, the goal is to protect the welfare of Wisconsin dogs and the consumers who buy or adopt them.