Animal lovers with a flair for detective work, public employees who deal with animal complaints, police officers and sheriff's deputies have a once-a-year chance to hone their animal handling skills this fall.

Registration is open until Wednesday, Sept. 19, for humane officer training, to be held Sept. 24-28 in Madison. Cost for the 40-hour course is $500. Graduates of the training who successfully complete the exam are eligible to pursue humane officer appointment by a local jurisdiction. The process of becoming appointed requires initiative on the part of the trained humane officer and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) can guide you through the process. For information and registration, go to http://datcp.wisconsin.gov/
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and click on "Animals", or call 608-224-4889.

The training, offered by DATCP, is open to anyone. Although it does cover companion animals, the heaviest emphasis is on livestock issues. Veterinarians, attorneys and law officers teach participants about animal husbandry and animal law, and how to gather evidence, write reports, and compile cases that district attorneys can take to court when necessary. Both classroom training and hands-on experience are included.

Humane officers investigate cases of animal abuse and neglect – in both livestock and small animals – for local or county governments. In some cases, they may educate animal owners rather than investigate them. Humane officers may be public employees, employees of humane agencies that contract with local governments, or independent contractors. They may also be law officers, although police and deputies can investigate animal cases without this training.

"Having someone available who can focus all his or her attention and skill on these cases often saves the local government time, money, and public anger at a 'bad' outcome. It's not only animals that are at stake; often animal abuse is the tip of a domestic abuse iceberg, so humane officers can be lifesavers in a very real sense," said state humane veterinarian Dr. Yvonne Bellay. "We strongly encourage local authorities to appoint humane officers, because they have this special set of skills and can handle these often contentious cases efficiently and effectively."

Local governments do not have to appoint humane officers; they can rely on their local law enforcement instead. However, if they do appoint humane officers, they must complete this course within a year. Even if they rely on local law officers, the course is recommended and does count toward the officers' continuing education requirements.

The benefits of having a trained humane officer include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Better use of personnel** because using a trained humane officer frees up law enforcement time and money.
- **More efficient investigation and prosecution of offenders**, which saves the government money.
- **Enhanced public image** because cases are handled appropriately and avoid unwanted negative attention to the locality.
- **Improved public confidence** since the humane officer has specialized training and knowledge of animals and animal law.