

TECHNICAL UPDATE

Volume 27 Number 52 | December 26, 2023

UNLEASHING THE LIABILITY OF PETS IN THE WORKPLACE

People love their pets, and we are seeing more and more pets, especially dogs, out in public spaces. A pet-friendly workplace may be a perk or a recruitment tool; however, there are numerous things to consider before allowing pets at work, such as liability. Pets should not be permitted without strict guidelines detailing what behavior is acceptable from the pet and the pet owner.

To mitigate these liability concerns, employers should create comprehensive pet policies that address issues such as acceptable pet behavior, pet supervision, and liability in case of incidents. Open communication about the expectations and guidelines for having pets in the workplace is crucial for a successful and safe pet-friendly environment.

PEOPLE COME FIRST

As a general rule of thumb when making decisions about allowing pets on the job, people come first. If an employee is allergic to animals, then asking other employees to leave their pets at home is a reasonable accommodation for the allergic employee under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Other possible accommodations for allergies are creating sufficient separation between the pet and the allergic person, increasing ventilation, or limiting the pet to certain areas. Please note that a service dog or service miniature horse is not a pet. These types of service animals are allowed under the ADA and cannot be banned from the workplace even if all other animals are banned.

There can be logistical challenges in accommodating pets, such as ensuring a pet-friendly environment, providing necessary amenities (like designated areas for pets), and addressing potential noise or cleanliness issues. There's also a risk of injuries caused by pet-related incidents, such as bites or scratches. Even well-behaved pets can react unpredictably in certain situations and exhibit aggressive behavior towards other pets or individuals.

LIABILITY CONCERNS

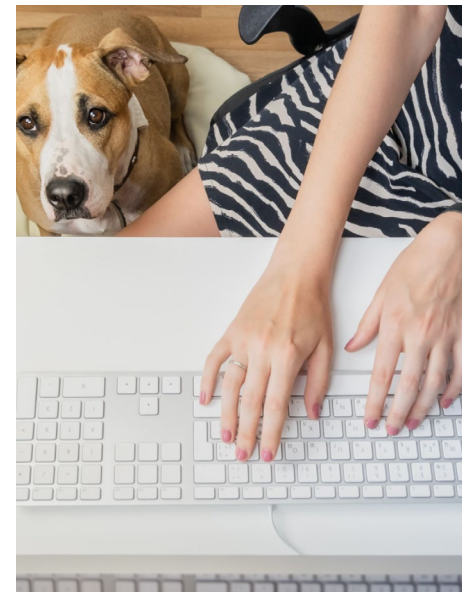
Before an employee is allowed to bring a pet to the workplace, they should be required to verify in writing that they have sufficient insurance, homeowner's or renter's, to cover any property damage or incidents caused by the pet. Consider asking the employee to sign a paycheck deduction authorization to cover any potential property damage (e.g., carpet cleaning) caused by their pet.

ADVANTAGES

Interacting with pets has been shown to reduce stress and promote a sense of well-being. Having pets in the workplace can create a more relaxed atmosphere. Pets can also contribute to a positive work culture and boost employee morale. Their presence can create a sense of community and camaraderie among colleagues. Allowing employees to bring their pets to work can contribute to a better work-life balance. It can be particularly beneficial for those who may otherwise have to leave their pets at home for long periods.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to allergies and liability concerns, consideration must also be given to pet health, cleanliness, and employee breaks to care for the pet, etc. Pets brought into work should be licensed, up-to-date on their vaccinations, and free of fleas, ticks, or other parasites. Will the employee be allowed extra breaks to take their pet outside to use the bathroom or for walks? Should the pet be kept on a leash or confined when visitors are at the workplace?



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

Colorado does not have any state laws addressing pets in the workplace. Employers have the discretion to set their own policies regarding whether or not pets are allowed in the workplace. Because of the risks involved with bringing pets into the workplace, CTSI does not recommend it. Bringing a pet to work has the potential to be a distraction and, in the case of a poorly behaved pet, endanger employees. For more information about the risks of bringing a pet to work, please contact CTSI at (303) 861-0507.