



Position Statement on Identification for Working Animals

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Introduction

The proper identification of working animals, such as assistance dogs, is essential to ensuring their effective role in supporting individuals with disabilities. These animals play a critical part in enhancing the quality of life for their handlers, providing support for a wide range of needs, from mobility and sensory assistance to emotional support. However, to ensure these animals can perform their tasks without distraction or interference, it is crucial that their identification is clear, respectful, and consistent.

A key issue in the identification of assistance animals is the presence of excessive branding, logos, and clutter on their vests. These adornments often serve as distractions rather than useful indicators of the animal's purpose. When vests are covered with numerous logos, written phrases, or images, they detract from the primary message—that the animal is working and should not be interacted with. In some cases, these excesses create confusion, making it more difficult for the public to quickly recognize that the animal is a working assistance animal. A handler may be approached unnecessarily, or worse, their privacy and autonomy may be compromised as people attempt to engage with the animal for attention or affection, hindering the animal's ability to perform its essential duties.

Moreover, excessive branding and unnecessary text on vests can unintentionally lead to incidents where the animal is seen as a form of advertising, rather than a professional working companion. For instance, if a vest includes numerous brand logos or corporate images, it might suggest that the animal's presence is tied to marketing or promotional purposes, overshadowing its primary function. This not only undermines the respect the animal deserves but also contributes to public confusion.

In addition to branding, it is important to avoid the inclusion of trademarked materials or any offensive, vulgar, or inappropriate phrases or images on assistance animals' vests. This could range from logos that have commercial or political associations to words or images that could be seen as disrespectful or controversial. Assistance animals should not be used as vehicles for free advertising or to promote particular causes in a way that detracts from their important work. For example, a vest featuring a large, flashy logo of a company or a slogan that includes coarse or disrespectful language may detract from the serious and professional nature of the animal's role. Such elements could also potentially contribute to public misunderstanding, fostering an environment where people feel they have permission to engage with the animal inappropriately.

The primary goal of any identification system for working animals should be clear, concise communication. Simple and visible text that clearly identifies the animal as an "Assistance Animal" will help ensure that the public can immediately recognize the animal's role and purpose. This reduces unnecessary interference and helps the animal and handler maintain focus in public spaces. For example, the term "Assistance Animal" or "Working Dog" should be the focus, with a straightforward, easy-to-read design that enables quick recognition. A minimalistic, uncluttered approach to these vests ensures that there is no ambiguity about the animal's purpose.

There is also a need to standardize the identification of working animals to further ease public understanding. While it may be tempting to make each vest unique or personalized, this could lead to more confusion and less consistent recognition across different environments. Standardized, simple designs would provide uniformity and help both individuals with disabilities

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and the general public better understand the rights and responsibilities surrounding assistance animals.

We must work together as a community, with the shared goal of ensuring that assistance animals are recognized and respected as vital professionals. It is not about using working animals as platforms for advertisement or promotional gain. The public should recognize that these animals are not pets, but rather highly trained professionals providing essential support. This requires all of us to move beyond the distractions of branding and logos and focus on what truly matters: effective, clear identification that serves the needs of the working animal, their handler, and the public.

By minimizing unnecessary branding, ensuring clear and simple identification, and avoiding inappropriate or distracting images, we can reduce incidents where assistance animals are improperly interacted with or misunderstood. The purpose of their identification is not to make a statement for any other reason than the essential work they perform. Let us ensure that their identification serves the singular goal of fostering respect, understanding, and ease of access in all public spaces.

We encourage all stakeholders, from assistance animal organisations and service providers to designers and legislators, to prioritise this common objective: to ensure the primary goal remains clear recognition of the animal's role—not promotion, branding, or commercial visibility.

Document Control

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