



AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB®

Current Animal Welfare Act – Licensing Requirements and Inspections

- The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) requires all facilities that use AWA-covered animals to obtain authorization (license) from the Animal Plant & Health Inspection Service (APHIS) prior to engaging in regulated activities. APHIS works with applicants to ensure they understand the requirements for a license and each applicant must demonstrate full compliance with the AWA regulations prior to obtaining a license.
- USDA AWA licensees are subject to regular, announced and unannounced inspections by the USDA Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS). According to the [FY2027 USDA APHIS budget justification](#), in 2025, USDA APHIS:
 - Oversaw close to 16,500 licensees and registrants with millions of AWA-covered animals used in research, exhibition, and the pet trade, as well as those transported in commerce.
 - Completed approximately 9,800 announced and unannounced inspections and evaluating more than 2 million AWA-covered species.
 - Conducted approximately 528 pre-licensing inspections for new licensees and issued 423 new licenses.
- Once issued, an AWA license remains valid for three years. At the end of this three-year period, the licensee must apply for a new license and again demonstrate full compliance during an announced inspection before APHIS will issue a new license for the facility. Following comment and input from **all** stakeholders, the new licensing requirement was put in place by a USDA [Final Rule](#) on May 13, 2020, effective November 9, 2020. Full implementation was completed on September 30, 2024. For additional information on the implementation of the licensing rule, see the USDA APHIS, [Animal Care Tech Note](#). In 2025, APHIS:
 - Conducted 1,613 licensing inspections for license holders that applied for a new license and issued approximately 1,440 licenses to those facilities that demonstrated full compliance with the AWA regulations.
 - APHIS also completed 52 announced inspections for licensed facilities that requested to add a new site to their license.
- During AWA compliance inspections, Agency officials examine and inspect animals, premises, facilities, husbandry practices, programs of veterinary care, records, and animal handling procedures. Although pre-license inspections are announced inspections, once a facility is licensed it is subject to unannounced compliance inspections. In 2025, APHIS:
 - Conducted 5,255 routine unannounced inspections, with approximately **97 percent of sites found to be substantially compliant** with the AWA regulations at the time of inspection.
 - APHIS conducted approximately 328 focused unannounced inspections to follow up on issues related to a noncompliant incident found during routine inspection or identified in a complaint submitted to the Agency. Focused inspections determine if a facility has addressed previously identified issues or if there is an ongoing risk to animal welfare that requires further attention.