

Sniffing out the best local kennels

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SEATTLE -- Dirty facilities, cramped spaces, and mediocre attention to pets are just some of the findings in a recent customer survey of local kennels.

Based on the survey results, you'd be wise to start shopping around long before you need board your pet.

Local [Consumers' CHECKBOOK magazine](#) subscribers rated 36 kennels for cleanliness, spaciousness, affection toward the animals, pick-up and drop-off arrangements and overall quality. On the plus side, most local kennels make a concerted effort to provide quality care.

The Elliott Bay Animal Hospital in Seattle, for example, got great ratings for cleanliness, and overall quality.

But feedback from different kennel customers across the Puget Sound region also reveals horror stories from some other kennels, such as pet injuries ignored, special diet needs ignored resulting in illness, animals returned with insect infestation, kennel cough, and infections.

CHECKBOOK sent surveys to local kennels and them to provide the daily rates to board a cat, and several different breeds and sizes of dogs. CHECKBOOK says its shoppers also made phone calls to kennels that did not respond to the surveys.

"To board a medium-sized dog for one week, we found prices ranging from about \$100 to about \$250 depending on the kennel," said CHECKBOOK President Robert Krughoff.

The CHECKBOOK survey found you really need a checklist. Ask a lot of questions, including what's covered in the quoted rate. What other services are available, and how much do they cost?

"Some of these kennels will charge you an extra \$8 bucks to give your dog a walk," Krughoff said. "Some will charge an extra \$2 or \$3 or \$4 to give a dog a pill."

Check to see whether your pet will have a place to get move around and get exercise. Will they have adequate protection from excessive cold or heat? Is there also a veterinary hospital or clinic? Does the staff have Pet Care certifications? Can visitors inspect the kennel at any time during business hours? Go the kennel without your pet and look around.

"I wouldn't want to choose any kennel that didn't make it very convenient for me to walk through when I get there and check them without their being able to do any special preparation or anything," Krughoff said. "Because I want to see how clean it is; I want to see how it smells, I want to see how protected the animals are."

Of the more than 36 local kennels in the survey, 22 got over all quality ratings of 75% or higher. Fifteen of the 36 kennels got top ratings for quality and 10 got top ratings for price.

But only 3 got top ratings for both quality and price:

- Canine Country Club in Fall City
- Win-Star Bed & Biscuit in Tacoma
- Prison Pet Partnership Program, staffed by inmates at the Women's Correctional Center in Gig Harbor.

CHECKBOOK found another good way to sniff out a good kennel is to talk to veterinarians in your community. Ask local vets to name two boarding kennels where they would feel most comfortable boarding their own pet, and two kennels where they would feel least comfortable.

The full survey results are published in the Winter/Spring 2009 edition of Puget Sound Consumers' CHECKBOOK Magazine.