



ABOUT ADOPTING

Why Shelters Around the Country are Dropping Breed Labels



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In a growing nationwide trend, shelters are dropping breed labels from cages and kennels, no longer identifying adoptable dogs by their breed alone.



A study by **The Animal Farm Foundation** found that adoptable dogs in shelters and rescues are misidentified at least 75% of the time when shelter staff and volunteers rely on appearance alone to determine a dog's breed.

“How a dog is labeled or their physical appearance is not an indication of their personality, their past or



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future behavior, or their suitability for a particular adoption placement,” said the director of the Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter in Georgetown, Texas in a **statement announcing** their decision to abandon breed labels last year.

“When you remove breed labels, you open the door to possibility. You have a chance to fall in love without being inhibited by breed,” said Cheryl Schneider, animal services director for Williamson County, in a statement. “Instead, fall in love by listening to your heart.”

The Pima Animal Care Center in Tucson, Arizona made the same decision last January.

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Justin Gallick, executive director of community engagement for the Pima Animal Care Center, explained that people are reluctant to adopt dogs that have been labeled pit bulls, for example, because they have been “vilified” by the media. And – they might not be pit bulls at all.

“I’ve seen an American Bulldog labeled a Mastiff Dalmatian because it had black and white spots and a bulky build,” he told [Green Valley News](#).

Michael Morefield, marketing and communications manager for the Arizona Animal Welfare League in Phoenix, said they stopped labeling dogs in 2016 after an Arizona State University study provided DNA testing on 700 shelter dogs, verifying a vast majority of them were misidentified.

In addition to proving breed labels wrong, the study showed potential



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adopters identical photos of dogs labeled with different breed names. The dogs labeled as 'pit bull' were considered less approachable, trainable, intelligent, and friendly than dogs labeled as another breed – despite being the exact same dogs.

In March of last year, the city of Rochester, New York also dropped breed labels in favor of promoting individual dogs for their personalities instead.

“We’re trying not to discriminate against the dogs,” **said Chris Fitzgerald**, the city’s director of animal services. “And, by extension, it is non-discriminatory for pet owners who don’t want their housing options to be limited by having a particular dog.”

The policy of dropping breed labels has also been adopted in recent months by shelters in **Florida, Illinois, Tennessee** and **Indiana**, among others.

What's your opinion? Do breed labels create unfair biases for or against adopting shelter dogs? Would you support your local shelter's decision to stop labeling breeds altogether? Weigh in with a comment below!

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