

Not every dog can get a ride to Mass.

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The hard truth of the Aiken County Animal Shelter's transfer agreement with a no-kill shelter in Massachusetts is that not every dog gets to go.

The new program with the Northeast Animal Shelter in Salem, Mass., is working very well, but there are no promises that every dog surrendered to or picked up by the County shelter will make the trip up north. The number of dogs to make the journey is agreed upon ahead of time, and though the transfers have been averaging two a month, that may not always be the case.

"People are calling and they're automatically assuming their animal is going to get transferred," said Bobby Arthurs, chief law enforcement officer with Aiken County Animal Control. "We have an over-abundance of animals and I can't make any promises. We're always over-crowded."

But, even with that in mind, shelter staff can't help but be overjoyed with the progress made so far.

Seventeen dogs left the County shelter Wednesday in a tractor trailer outfitted with bedding and water courtesy of Fairway Horse Transport. It is the most that has been transported so far.

"The reason for that is some of the breeds were smaller," Arthurs said. "This went really well."

In February 2008, 364 dogs were euthanized. In February of this year, 293 dogs were euthanized meaning 71 fewer dogs were put to sleep in the same period. What's more, fewer dogs were surrendered or picked up in the same months.

Arthurs attributes the decrease, in part, to the transfer agreement.

"Those are some big numbers for us," he said.

The 17 dogs transported to Massachusetts will, in effect, save their lives and hopefully that of 17 more who will take their place in the adoption pens at the County shelter.

For a list of animals up for adoption at the shelter, visit www.petfinder.com.