

IAATO Memorandum on Service Animals in Antarctica

Background

In recent years, the term *service animal* or *assistance animal* has increasingly been used to describe animals, primarily dogs¹, which have been trained to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities. In many countries, assistance animals are protected by law and therefore may accompany their handlers most places that are open to the public. In some countries, this includes cruise ships and could potentially include a cruise ship in the Antarctic Treaty area.

Article 4 of the *Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty* (1991) states that “No species of animal or plant not native to the Antarctic Treaty area shall be introduced onto land or ice shelves, or into water in the Antarctic Treaty except in accordance with a permit.” While the guidelines for such permits do not include service animals, some Treaty Parties have indicated service animals may be allowed aboard ships in the Treaty area, but not ashore, in order to comply with their respective domestic legislation protecting disabled citizens.

IAATO Advice on Service Animals

- The decision to allow a service animal aboard a ship will need to take into account the operator’s competent authority’s views, and that authority’s legal requirements regarding disability legislation. Check with your authorizing Treaty Party.
- Check with applicable Port State Control regulations regarding service animals embarking ships at gateway ports.
- Operators who carry service animals will need to have additional procedures in place to take care of the service animal’s urine (e.g. special mats that would be incinerated regularly) and feces (which would necessarily go through the ship’s black water treatment system).
- Operators and/or a service animal’s handler should not take the animal ashore, onto ice shelves or into small boats while in the Antarctic Treaty Area, due to the risk to the environment and wildlife.
- One Treaty Party (USA) recommends that extra procedures should be put into place to help ensure that the clothing of those that have come into contact with the service animal, is clear of any animal hair before going ashore; e.g. through the use of a lint roller. This would be supplemental to normal biosecurity procedures.

¹ The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), September 2010, defines Service Animal “any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability.” Under the ADA other species of animals are not service animals for the purposes of this definition, which also excludes comfort animals (pets that owners keep with them for emotional reasons). The UK has similar requirements, however laws in other countries may differ.