



DOG AND CAT OVERPOPULATION

INTRODUCTION

Are dogs and cats the nation's most popular animals? It doesn't seem so when millions¹ of healthy dogs, cats, puppies and kittens have to be killed each year in private and public shelters due to lack of responsible homes. Countless others starve or freeze to death, are killed by humans or animals, or die from untreated illnesses and injuries after being abandoned to fend for themselves. If given the chance, most of these animals would have made excellent companions.

THE PROBLEMS

The breeding rate of puppies and kittens greatly exceeds the number of homes available to animals. Negligent individuals who fail to have their dogs and cats spayed or neutered to prevent reproduction, commercial and hobby breeders, and puppy mills, continue to bring more puppies and kittens into an already overpopulated world, thereby ensuring that the vast majority of animals brought to shelters will not be placed in adoptive homes. The way by which many people acquire animals also contributes to the mass killing. Instead of adopting from a shelter and signing an adoption contract many people:

1. Answer "free to a good home" or "animals for sale" ads.
2. Buy from a pet shop.
3. Buy from a breeder.
4. Acquire a puppy or kitten from a neighbor's or friend's unwanted litter.

Acquiring animals from the above sources condemns shelter animals to death. Only 2.2 to 15% of dogs and .2 to 3% of cats brought to shelters are placed in homes. The rest are killed, or, worse, turned over to dealers or laboratories. On average, 25% of animals killed in shelters are purebred. In some regions, 50% are purebred. The most popular breeds are often found in shelters in the greatest numbers.

This endless killing perverts a major purpose of humane societies, which is to prevent suffering and to investigate and prosecute cases of animal cruelty. Vast numbers of animals briefly cared for and then killed in shelters are an enormous drain on both public

¹ Neither ISAR, nor any other organization in the United States has a reliable estimate of how many dogs and cats are euthanized annually by shelters in this country.

funds and on private philanthropy. Governmental agencies and humane societies are forced to devote their resources to processing and killing animals, while education, investigation, and prosecution go without funding.

THE SOLUTION

The solution is to adopt animals only from shelters and have them spayed or neutered to prevent the cruel overpopulation that condemns millions of animals a year to death in the United States. We may facilitate this solution with the following actions:

- A forthright discussion of the problem, in which humane societies and shelters disclose the number of animals they are forced to kill (see ISAR's Report entitled "Model Euthanasia Statistics Statute," which contains model legislation).
- Implementing mandatory adoption sterilization in every state, requiring every dog, cat, puppy and kitten adopted from an animal shelter to be spayed or neutered as part of the adoption contract (see ISAR's Report entitled "Mandatory Adoption Sterilization Statute," which includes model legislation).
- Passage of mandatory spay/neuter legislation to dramatically reduce the number of unwanted animals (see ISAR's Report entitled "Model Mandatory Spay/Neuter Statute," which includes model legislation).
- Establishing low cost spay and neuter clinics. Areas with efficiently run clinics have seen dramatic reductions in the number of animals killed in shelters. Vancouver, British Columbia, and Las Vegas, Nevada, are two examples.
- Frequent media coverage of the daily killing at shelters, combined with public appeals to spay and neuter companion animals, and to adopt from shelters rather than buy animals from pet stores or breeders.
- Educating the public on the tragedy of purebreds. The unnatural process of inbreeding causes painful and life threatening conditions. Hip displasia in the larger breeds, spinal disc ailment in dachshunds, and respiratory distress in short-nosed breeds are only a few of the more visible problems. See ISAR's AKC Report for more information.
- Cessation of animal sales by pet stores and commercial and hobby breeders. Animals should only be acquired from shelters. They are not commodities. They should not be sold. Please see ISAR's *Report* on puppy mills for information on how these deplorable breeding factories contribute to pet overpopulation.

THE ADVANTAGES OF SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Spaying and neutering not only saves countless lives by preventing the birth of more animals into an overpopulated world, there are also many direct advantages to both guardians and animals when pets are spayed or neutered.

SPAYING

- Behavioral Benefits - Spaying eliminates reproductive cycling.

Therefore, a spayed dog or cat will not attract packs of male animals. The spayed animal is content to stay at home and is not inclined to roam and annoy the neighbors. Spayed animals are less likely to bark or howl excessively. Spaying also prevents personality changes caused by hormonal differences.

- Health Benefits-Spaying eliminates false pregnancies, uterine infections and the possibility of uterine or ovarian cancers. Spaying also greatly reduces the risk of many diseases, including breast cancer. See ISAR's *Report on Juvenile spaying and neutering* for more information.

The idea that an animal will become fat and lazy if she is spayed is untrue. Inactivity and overfeeding cause weight gain and laziness, not spaying. The thought that a dog or cat should be permitted to have one litter before being spayed is also mistaken, as is the notion that children should witness animal births. For those who want their children to witness "the miracle of birth," consider instead offering them a valuable lesson in responsibility. Responsible people would not want children to witness the killing of animals in shelters because caretakers did not have their animals spayed or neutered.

NEUTERING

- Behavioral Benefits - The neutered male cat does not spray or fill the house with an obnoxious odor, as does the un neutered male. Unaltered males are more likely to exert dominance over family members and are more apt to bite than altered pets. Neutering curbs aggression, fighting, and excessive barking and howling. Neutering reduces the tendency to roam and prevents the male from trying to get out to pursue females in heat, thereby decreasing his likelihood of becoming lost or being injured by other animals, unkind humans, or being struck by motor vehicles.

- Health Benefits-Neutering eliminates or greatly reduces risk for the following conditions: testicular tumors; perianal tumors and hernias; prostate enlargement, infections, and cancerous tumors; and neutering reduces the chance urinary problems which tend to occur in later life among many unaltered male animals.

Due to health and behavioral benefits, spayed and neutered animals live an average as twice as long as their unaltered counterparts.

There are also human safety benefits derived from spaying and neutering dogs. The media reports horrifying accounts of people being knocked down, bitten and sometimes killed by dogs or dog packs. Few people realize that the cause is often that the child or adult has been near an unspayed female dog and the scent of that dog is on the person, thus attracting the unneutered dog or dogs. According to the Associated Press, Dr. Richard Fondrk of Hope Veterinary Hospital said the female's smell would prompt male dogs to compete for her attention even if she was absent and "cause some aggressive behavior in the pack."

In the interest of safeguarding human life, responsible people have their animals spayed or neutered.

NEGLECT, ABUSE AND INDIFFERENCE

We can teach respect for sentient life to children by being responsible in our care of animals. In turn children will realize that all life deserves respect and care.

HOW TO HELP

- Have your animals spayed or neutered.
- Urge friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers to do the same. The overwhelming importance of spaying and neutering warrants you to encourage acquaintances, perfect strangers, and even mortal enemies to spay or neuter their companion animals.
- Always adopt your companion animals from shelters. Encourage others to do the same.
- Don't shop at pet stores that sell puppies or kittens and be sure to let them know why they won't be getting your business. Suggest instead that they offer adoption days in conjunction with local shelters. Likewise, be sure to write a letter of appreciation to pet stores that do not sell animals. For stores that wish to take a stronger stand against pet overpopulation, you may wish to suggest they offer a discount one day a week to guardians who provide proof that their pets are spayed or neutered.
- If your local shelters do not operate a low cost spay/neuter clinic, ask them to contact ISAR for information on how to establish one.
- Seek introduction of a mandatory spay/neuter statute, euthanasia statistics statute, and adoption sterilization statute (available from ISAR) in your area.
- Attend or coordinate a candlelight vigil for National Homeless Animals' Day, sponsored by ISAR. Contact ISAR for information on this annual event held on the third Saturday in August in remembrance of homeless animals.
- Help us spread the word! There are many ways you can help us to educate others about the tragedy of pet overpopulation and its solutions. Please inquire for information on how to be a volunteer for ISAR.
- Visit local schools and other gatherings of young people and speak about pet overpopulation and the importance of responsible pet care.
- Create displays in public libraries, malls, schools, etc. which focus on pet overpopulation and set up information tables at community events. Materials are available from ISAR.

- Ask your local radio and television stations to air ISAR's Public Service Announcements on pet overpopulation. We currently have radio PSAs recorded by Bob Barker, Kiki Ebsen and Brandon McKennah. TV PSAs are available by Bob Barker.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on pet overpopulation. Form letters are available from ISAR.