



Companion Animal
Fact Sheet #1

FUND FACTS

HIDDEN HOLOCAUST: THE OVERPOPULATION CRISIS

**KILLING THE SURPLUS:
Up to ten million healthy
animals are killed in U.S.
pounds and shelters
every year. The killing
could easily be prevented
by spaying and neutering.**

THE HARSH REALITY

Euthanasia is the single largest cause of death for dogs and cats in the U.S. Each day an estimated 70,000 puppies and kittens are born (25.5 million a year). Six to ten million, we classify as “surplus” and kill. These numbers *do not* include the millions of dead dogs and cats whose bodies we scrape off the streets, or the hundreds of thousands of abandoned, severely neglected or abused ones who never make it to our shelters to be counted and killed. The six to ten million figure represents those we “must” kill because they are unwanted. Most of these animals are young and healthy; in fact, it is estimated that a majority are less than one year of age.

The problem is simple: we have too many dogs and cats. Too many for the too few homes available. The solution we have opted for is to kill the extras. This solution has been considered acceptable by default, as though there were no other way to control the crisis. And we spend over \$600 million every year destroying “man’s best friend.”

THE CAUSE

No single segment of the public can be blamed for dog and cat overpopulation; overall responsibility is shared by many groups. The source of the problem includes accidental matings, purposeful breeding by those hoping to sell the offspring, and “personal” reasons like, “I want my children to experience the miracle of birth,” and “I feel it’s unnatural to castrate my male.”

IRRESPONSIBLE GUARDIANS

Animal guardians who do not spay and neuter are the greatest single cause of the companion animal tragedy. Many of these “owners” have no intention of breeding their animals, but it happens. Some, on the other hand, want their children to “experience the miracle of birth,” but don’t think about the results of letting their animal have “just one litter” – the tragedy of death.

Simple arithmetic illustrates how “just one litter” contributes to the mass killing: Two dogs breed. Six offspring are born. The six offspring reproduce within one year, and are responsible for

six offspring each. In one year a litter of six can become 36. And unfortunately, it doesn’t stop there. At the end of ten years just one unaltered dog can be responsible for 4,372 births. One unaltered cat can be responsible for 420,000 kittens in just seven years!

PET SHOPS AND PUPPY MILLS

Puppy mills are a major contributor to the dog overpopulation crisis. The demand for certain breeds encourages the continuation of these mass breeding facilities that whole-



This dog was one of the lucky ones who died in a humane shelter rather than on the streets. Here caring shelter workers administer a fatal injection of sodium pentobarbital.

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sale puppies to pet stores. The majority of puppy mills are in the rural Midwest, particularly Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Arkansas. It is estimated that some 5,000 puppy mills are operating today, breeding more than *one half million* dogs in a year.

Many puppies in these assembly-line businesses are housed in cramped, make-shift cages. They are usually outdoors during the freezing winter and grueling summer heat. They receive inadequate nourishment and poor medical care, and endure the stress of being shipped long distances at an early age, as young as four to five weeks. And because they receive deficient care they are highly prone to disease.

HOBBY AND PROFESSIONAL BREEDERS

We can't ignore the contribution made by professional and hobby breeders. It isn't only mutts and mixed breeds

that end up at shelters. Purebred dogs make up 20 to 25% of shelter populations. Some are adopted, but most are not. Victims of the euthanasia room, contrary to what many professional breeders admit, include purebreds.

Purebred dogs come from many sources: pet stores (via puppy mills), breeders, and people who allow their purebreds to have "just one litter." Because we are so preoccupied with finding the dog or cat with the "perfect" coloring, stance, or tail length, the demand for certain breeds continues. *Purebreds do not make better companions than mixed breeds.* There are actually disadvantages to having purebreds (high price and genetic problems). Purchasing an AKC dog (one registered with the American Kennel Club) does not guarantee a higher quality animal. In fact, the case is quite the contrary. There are cur-

"Shelters are doing the public's dirty work."



rently more than 200 genetic diseases in purebred dogs including deafness, epilepsy, cataracts, glaucoma, retinal degeneration and hip dysplasia. Purebred cats also suffer from genetic problems.

THE SOLUTION

To solve the problem we must prevent animals from being born. The measures taken thus far include these three approaches:

- humane education programs
- affordable and accessible spay/neuter clinics
- enforcement of laws (*i.e.* leash laws, mandatory licensing, and other ordinances pertaining to responsible animal guardianship)

HUMANE EDUCATION

Because all three approaches must be taken concurrently, it is critical that our efforts to educate the public about the problem increase. Animal shelters are doing the public's dirty work. They care for the animals people discard, and must destroy those for whom no homes can be found. But for the public it's still a matter of "out of sight, out of mind."

No longer can this problem be considered our shelter's responsibility. We must *all* begin to take responsibility for the animals ending up in shelters.

Education programs must be developed for adults, because adults are responsible for dogs and cats. At the same time we must reach youth. By teaching children how to be caring and responsible animal guardians early, it is hoped they will grow to be more sensitive and responsible adults. Adults who will create a more compassionate world for all. It's a long-term investment that *must* be made.



“To solve the problem we must prevent animals from being born.”



SPAY/NEUTER CLINICS

Low cost spay/neuter clinics provide an affordable solution. Spaying is a surgical technique performed on females. It involves removal of both ovaries and the uterus. The operation prevents an animal from having heat periods and eliminates the ability to become pregnant.

Neutering is a surgical technique performed on male animals involving the removal of the testicles. This prevents the production of sperm and eliminates the possibility of the animal impregnating a female.

Both surgeries have traditionally been performed on animals six months of age and older. However, many clinics are now sterilizing puppies and kittens as young as eight weeks. The early procedure is still somewhat controversial among the veterinary medical community, primarily because the early age limit departs greatly from tradition. To date, no serious side effects have occurred from early spaying and neutering. It is likely that it will become commonplace within the next few years.

“Victims of the euthanasia room... include purebreds.”

The Fund Promotes Breeding Regulation Laws

The Fund for Animals is committed to finding new and innovative ways to solve this crisis.

Low-cost spay and neuter clinics help, but only somewhat. Humane education programs are important, but are not enough. Shelters have spent years trying to solve this problem, but the statistics show they cannot do it alone. Five to ten million “surplus” animals don’t represent a successful story. We must do better for our companion animals!

The Fund for Animals works with communities across the country in passing legislation that regulates the breeding of dogs and cats. The legislation requires animal guardians to spay and neuter their companions or apply for a breeding permit. Extreme? Not when you consider how we have chosen to “solve” the problem to date. Killing the “surplus” is extreme, not regulating breeding. Cities such as Denver, CO and Honolulu, HI have already implemented successful forms of spay/neuter legislation.

The time has come when it must no longer be acceptable to casually breed a dog or cat. Driving drunk kills, and is now a crime. Fur coats kill, and are falling from fashion. Smoking kills, and it is becoming socially unacceptable. The Fund for Animals wants it to become taboo to not have a companion animal sterilized. Overpopulation kills, and accidental or purposeful breeding must fall from fashion, and no longer be tolerated. It is a crime against the six to ten million homeless dogs and cats we are killing every year. Urge your state and federal legislators to support laws regulating breeding especially puppy mills. Visit www.fund.org for more information on current legislative efforts.

Spay/Neuter Ordinance Guide

To receive a copy of “Killing the Crisis, Not the Animal,” a how-to guide on initiating a spay/neuter incentive ordinance at the city or county level, contact The Fund for Animals, 8121 Georgia Avenue, Suite 301, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4933; (301) 585-2591.



THE MYTHS

A host of myths surround spaying and neutering. Unfortunately, they often discourage people from having the surgery performed on their animals. We must battle misconceptions with facts – dogs' and cats' lives depend on it. Following are some of the myths with the correct information:

1 Preventing animals from having litters is unnatural.

False. We've already interfered with nature by domesticating dogs and cats. In doing so we helped create their overpopulation. We must now take responsibility for solving it.

2 It's better to allow a female to have one litter before spaying.

False. The best time to spay a female is before her first heat. Early spaying greatly reduces the incidence of mammary cancer.

3 Behavior is adversely affected by surgery.

False. The only change in behavior is positive. Male cats tend to reduce territorial spraying, depending on their age at neutering. Neutered dogs and cats fight less, resulting in fewer battle scars, contagious diseases and abscesses. They also wander less, because they aren't as interested in pursuing females in heat.

4 Animals become fat and lazy after spaying and neutering.

False. In most cases animals become fat and "lazy" only if their guardian overfeeds and under-exercises them.

5 We don't need to neuter males because they don't have litters.

False. It takes two to tango. In fact, one unaltered male can be responsible for impregnating dozens of females.

MEDICAL BENEFITS OF SPAYING & NEUTERING

Spaying and neutering not only curtails overpopulation, it also provides medical benefits to the animal:

- Neutering decreases and often eliminates diseases that intact male dogs are prone to later in life, including diseases of the prostate, testicles and other tissues influenced by male hormones. Testicular and perianal gland cancers are the second and third most frequently diagnosed tumors in older intact male dogs.
- Spaying female cats and dogs en-

tirely eliminates diseases of the ovaries and uterus, and, if performed before their first or second heat, drastically decreases the chance of mammary gland cancer. Mammary cancer is very common in older intact females, and is the most common cancer to spread to the lungs.

- Neutering greatly reduces the risk of injuries and illnesses to males. Unaltered males tend to roam, increasing their chances of being killed or injured. They also tend to fight more, which guarantees wounds and infections.

What You Can Do

You can help end dog and cat overpopulation:

- Spay or neuter your dogs and cats and encourage others to do the same.
- Adopt from your local animal shelter. All shelters are overloaded with adoptable animals who need homes.
- Don't buy animals from pet stores. Chances are the cute puppy in the window came from a puppy mill. Purchasing dogs from pet stores perpetuates the cruel puppy mill industry.
- Don't buy from breeders. Again, by purchasing an animal from a breeder you are encouraging the breeding of more animals. It doesn't make sense to breed more when we must kill so many. If you have your heart set on adopting a particular breed, visit a shelter or contact a local breed rescue club.
- Support your local shelter by volunteering. Many shelters are in desperate need of volunteers.

