A. This can be done by a layman, of course, and is sometimes used for euthanasia. The pentobarbital can be disguised in a ball of canned dog food for dogs or can be administered as one would administer any other oral drug. Physical administration is best for cats as their keen sense of smell and taste will usually prevent them from taking the drug in food, even when they are hungry. The effect is generally humane, but we feel oral administration of this drug is best used only for sedation as a pre-euthanasia technique.

Q. Do you recommend the so-called "high altitude" or "decompression" chamber?

A. We do not. There have been too many complaints about the effects of decomposition on animals from animal shelters using this equipment. While the theory of death by decomposition seems good, it is clear that the equipment in use and being manufactured does not accomplish humane destruction as is often claimed. We do not feel that the clean bill of health given this method by the American Veterinary Medical Association was the result of adequate study and investigation of how these machines are used in animal shelters. Our own experience with the method is extensive and raises very serious questions about its humaneness. Of course, it must always be borne in mind that the decomposition chamber is better than such archaic measures as the clubbing of animals to death.

Q. What about electrocution?

A. It is humane when properly done and when the equipment is kept in good repair. Generally, however, it calls for pre-anesthetization by tranquilizer or other sedative to minimize fear in the animal. With electricity, of course, there is always present an element of danger to the operator. Generally speaking, therefore, we no longer encourage use of this method.

Q. One hears of animals being shot to death in rural communities to dispose of them. What does HSUS think of that?

A. Although obviously unaesthetic, shooting can be humane if it is done properly. The bullet must penetrate the cranial vault and travel into the brain. To find that spot for fourfooted animals, visualize an imaginary line from one ear (at the base) to the opposite eye. Repeat this for the other ear and eye. Where the two lines cross is the approximate brain center. (Note that the old claim of "shooting between the eyes" is not correct.)

Shooting should not be recommended as a continuing method of euthanasia. Too often it leads to animal control officers shooting at dogs on the run. This should not normally be done. We examine its merits here only because it is sometimes necessary in emergency cases (especially with larger animals) in field work to save an animal from suffering by dispatching it in this manner.

Q. Is any new research being done on euthanasia methods?

A. Yes. Research is now being done on a nitrogen gas flushing unit that holds good promise. Nitrogen is nontoxic, nonflammable, odorless, colorless, and fairly safe for the operator. Further, its use is both economical and humane. We are hopeful that something concrete will be forthcoming from this research before the end of 1973.