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Puppy Mill Closure: The Economic Impact on a Local Community

When a substandard dog-breeding facility (a puppy mill) closes, removing the dogs can drain the financial resources of a community, local animal welfare entities, and large humane organizations. Towns rarely derive any benefit from puppy mills, as they employ few staff, often don't pay required taxes or license fees, generate much animal waste and pollution, and cause unpleasant odors and noise. Once a major puppy mill enterprise is discovered, many communities don't have the necessary resources to handle the situation. Prevention is the key, and communities should discourage large scale breeding facilities from locating in their area.

One law enforcement official told an HSUS cruelty investigator, "If an event involving more than 100 dogs occurs, we will just ignore it because we simply don't have the resources to handle the problem." But ignoring the problem just perpetuates the suffering and allows additional breeding facilities to be created. A puppy mill with 100 dogs, if unchecked and unmonitored, often continues to grow until it houses 300, 500, or in some cases even more than 1,000 dogs, and its effects on the community can no longer be ignored.

Properly monitoring large-scale dog breeding facilities, including working with breeders to correct any problems with animal husbandry practices before substandard conditions become out of control, can prevent the need for large-scale seizures and huge financial costs to the humane societies, police, and municipal governments that must rescue the dogs from squalid conditions.

Community Impact Examples

North Dakota Puppy Mill, July 2013

When 170 dogs were rescued from a puppy mill near Fargo, N.D. on July 10, 2013, the **bill for their veterinary care and boarding alone exceeded \$114,900**, as disclosed by Sergeant Tara Morris of the Cass County Sheriff's Office to local news media. That amounted to about \$675 for each dog's medical care, not including the costs of the rescue itself, the costs of deploying law enforcement equipment and personnel, or expenses related to the judicial proceedings. The Casselton Veterinary Clinic reportedly gave a huge discount to the agency, and the remainder was paid by public donations due to the widespread local media coverage that followed the rescue. However, had the media outreach not been so successful, local agencies would have had to foot the entire bill.

Montana Puppy Mill, October 2011

In October 2011, The HSUS assisted local authorities in rescuing 161 malamutes from a Montana AKC breeder due to animal cruelty. Authorities seized several pregnant females and the number of dogs needing care quickly exceeded 200. The owner was not convicted of 91 cruelty charges until October 2012. During the year-long trial, The HSUS reimbursed expenses to a local animal care agency caring for the 200 dogs. The HSUS's initial outlay for equipment and deployment costs was about \$81,000, but after reimbursing the local animal care agencies for the care and feeding of the dogs during the judicial process, The HSUS's **expenses totaled almost \$500,000**. Had The HSUS not been able to help, these costs would have been shouldered by the local agencies.

Vermont Puppy Mill, July 2011

The HSUS recently facilitated the removal, emergency sheltering, and initial veterinary care for 58 Labrador retrievers removed from a puppy mill in Vermont after the operator was charged with animal cruelty. The cost to The HSUS of deploying the Rescue Team, purchasing animal care supplies, transporting animals, traveling, and assisting in the removal and initial treatment of the animals was \$52,675, or almost \$1,000 per animal rescued. This cost did not include the salaries of law enforcement and security staff deployed to the scene, the cost of the legal proceedings, or the cost of the first 30 days of supervised, climate-controlled sheltering, which was donated by a local horse farm and partially staffed by unpaid volunteers. The value of sheltering the animals at \$10 per animal per day would have added an additional \$17,400 to the costs, for a total of \$70,075, or more than \$1,200 per animal rescued. Extensive follow-up medical expenses for some of the animals, including some who required amputations and tumor removals, are not included in this estimate.

Washington State Puppy Mill, June 2009

The HSUS facilitated the removal, emergency sheltering, and initial veterinary care for 371 dogs from a puppy mill in Washington after the owner was charged with animal cruelty for harboring sick animals in dilapidated housing. Individuals reportedly donated approximately \$12,000 to the local sheriff's department to help care for the dogs. However, law enforcement authorities reported that the estimated cost of the operation was approximately \$330,000, which included the direct costs of the services from local veterinarians and clinics for the first 30 days of animal care. Most of the services, however, were provided to the county at no charge by The HSUS.

Tennessee Puppy Mill, June 2008

The HSUS led the effort to close a Tennessee puppy mill containing 700 dogs. We accomplished our goal over a span of six days at a cost to us of approximately \$120,000 – not including the financial costs incurred by the many other groups working with us and the local community government, or the costs associated with investigating the facility, filing charges, and holding the long judicial process. Local animal shelters also expended significant resources when they received dogs from this facility, processed them, spayed/neutered them, handled continuing medical problems, and found them good homes. Approximately 50 people a day (experts and volunteers), including numerous local, state, and national humane organizations, participated and local law enforcement officials handled criminal aspects of the case, as well as increased traffic and security problems. The HSUS incurred costs for renting a large building for the temporary shelter and all the associated expenses, medical issues, and housing and meals for humans in this rural area, in addition to the direct costs for caring for the animals.

Virginia Puppy Mill, October 2008

In another case in October 2007, a small community in southwestern Virginia was suddenly confronted with the need to care for more than 1,000 dogs after a local puppy breeding facility's conditions were exposed. In a February 2008 letter sent to Delegate Robert Orrock, County Administrator Gary Larrowe said, *"We declared a local emergency and took action in establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in getting each animal documented, seen by a Veterinarian, setting up phone lines, e-mail addresses, establishing a command post, developing media kits, conducting scores of interviews and dealing with satellite trucks from across the east coast. Not only were we experiencing pressure from the rest of the world, we had 1100 animals to make sure they were cared for in the best possible way. During the event, we had many births even in transit from the alleged Puppy Mill to the command center. The volunteer Veterinarians from various regions came to our rescue through the call for help by the Commonwealth Emergency Operations Center in Richmond. Along with the professionals, we had assistance from animal rights volunteer groups such as VA PAWS and HSUS plus many Humane Society(s) and SPCAs from Florida to New York. The real work to get this project completed took more than two weeks of dedicated efforts by paid staff and volunteers. I bring the elements of the above real-life case to you because if Carroll County had to actually pay for the entire operation to deal with the alleged "Puppy Mill", I would estimate the cost at more than \$100,000."* Mr. Larrowe's letter was sent in support of legislation that became law to limit the size of Virginia breeding facilities and provide other safeguards. This new law is aimed at preventing the existence of substandard puppy mills in Virginia.

Maine Puppy Mill Seizure, August 2007 through March 2008

A puppy mill in Buxton, Maine was found selling sick animals over the Internet and 249 animals were seized, while 102 more were born during the subsequent case duration.

Costs included six to seven weeks of sheltering the animals on the kennel property with round-the-clock security. Animals were transported to a temporary emergency shelter during mid-October and spent an additional four to five months there. The total cost to the state of Maine was approximately \$440,000. Two lead shelters, Animal Welfare Society and Animal Refuge League, also raised funds for the effort and likely brought in approximately another \$30,000 to cover costs that would have otherwise been charged to the state.

The HSUS spent approximately \$40,000, which covered deployment of five to six volunteers per day for the first six weeks of the case. The HSUS's Maine state director spent approximately 8 to 10 weeks on site daily, and two other HSUS staff assisted as well. The HSUS sent in a management team for a week and provided at least one responder for a few weeks following the full week. The HSUS also provided a team to prepare for and set up the temporary shelter and transport the animals to the new site. An HSUS large sheltering vehicle was used during the move. **Total costs: \$510,000.**

PetSmart Charities® Contributes to Most Natural and Man-made Disasters

PetSmart is one of the largest pet retail corporations in the world, and it funds an independent nonprofit organization called PetSmart Charities®. The organization works with many major animal protection groups in handling man-made or natural disasters. PetSmart Charities® donates truckloads of supplies, making it possible for puppy mills to be closed and the animals taken to humane housing. PetSmart Charities donates food, strong cages, kitty litter, food and water bowls, disinfectants, puppy pads, and many other pet supplies quickly and efficiently. This service is invaluable to groups such as The HSUS. A tractor trailer full of supplies is estimated to be worth **\$50,000 each**, not including the cost of transportation or staff. In addition to the retail value of the truck, there is typically a **\$1,600** haul charge to the site. PetSmart Charities usually provides four volunteers for a minimum of four days and nights and covers all expenses such as hotel, airfare, meals, car rentals, etc. For the Tennessee puppy mill event (see above), the organization sent one and a half truckloads of supplies. (Leftover supplies, including cages, are donated to local humane groups after the emergency situation is settled.)

Responding Shelters and Rescue Groups Incur Expenses Long after the Removal

In addition to the costs to local taxpayers, courts, and municipalities, nonprofit rescue organizations often incur high costs when assisting in puppy mill rescues. For example:

- In January 2011, a Houston-area shelter spent more than \$79,000 to treat, house, and care for 241 dogs rescued from a hoarding and breeding facility. This included medical care such as vaccinations, worming, and post-natal care; veterinary boarding; and transportation. (The HSUS reimbursed expenses.)
- A Virginia nonprofit dog and cat rescue organization that took in five dogs surrendered by a Missouri puppy mill in 2010 spent \$4,227 (more than \$845 per dog) to treat the neglected animals before they were healthy enough for adoption. One dog required a large tumor removal and several required treatment for eye and dental disorders. Among the five dogs, there were a total of 62 dental extractions required, with some dogs losing more than 20 of their teeth. (The HSUS reimbursed expenses.)
- An SPCA in Cumberland County, New Jersey, spent more than \$5,000 in 2010 to care for 88 dogs and puppies relinquished by a substandard breeder. Care included vaccinations, parasite treatments, and boarding and feeding the animals until they were ready for adoption. (The HSUS reimbursed expenses.)

Other Costs of Closing a Facility

- The costs of closing down a puppy mill are diverse and include more than just the removal and treatment of the animals. Extensive staff time, including law enforcement staff time, is needed to investigate a facility and document the problems. Dealing with 300, 500, or even 1,000 dogs is a massive and expensive undertaking. Specially equipped trucks, hundreds of cages, food, water, medical supplies, cleaning supplies, bowls, hazmat gear, waste disposal essentials, and other supplies must be brought to the site. Professional dog handlers, veterinarians, veterinary technicians, animal experts, and numerous volunteers are needed.
- A separate facility (e.g., a warehouse or fairgrounds) is usually needed to place the animals once they are removed from the breeding facility, incurring costs for utilities, rent, and insurance. Animals are usually transported from the area on trucks, thus incurring high fuel and equipment bills. No single local animal shelter will be able to meet the immediate needs of such a large number of animals. In addition, food and lodging may be needed for many volunteers and experts on site.
- When dogs and puppies are removed, each animal is potential evidence and has to be carefully documented, photographed, and examined for medical problems. In addition to sheltering, each animal is given necessary vaccinations, grooming, and flea/tick medication, and in some cases is placed with a shelter or foster family. If the animals are made available for adoption, then the intake shelter will incur the expense of transporting the dogs hundreds of miles (staff, vehicle use, fuel costs), as well as of caring for the dogs and ensuring they are spayed or neutered before adoption.
- When there is a possibility of criminal charges, the expenses increase substantially, as even more time and documentation is required. If criminal charges are not brought, chances are high the breeders will immediately go back into business with similar results. *If an owner chooses not to relinquish ownership of the animals and if no bonding provisions exist, the local community can be forced to house and care for the animals for months to more than a year pending court action.* The costs associated with such a large undertaking can be staggering and may be larger than the entire local government budget.

Why So Expensive?

Taking care of a large number of dogs is always a financial commitment, but these figures are staggering. Why does it cost so much to close down a substandard breeding facility?

Transportation: First, the animals are living in horrible conditions and must be moved immediately and given extensive medical care. The humane transportation of so many animals to a temporary shelter and then to shelters throughout the country involves very large trucks specially equipped with proper heating, cooling, ventilation, and cages. Fuel is costly.

Medical care: Veterinarians, vet techs, examination rooms and equipment, drugs, and medical supplies are expensive – even when many services and supplies are donated. If the animals are released and must be placed out of state, each animal must travel with proof of rabies vaccination and an individual health certificate signed by a licensed vet.

Staff time: Because the animals are so stressed by this process (many have never left their cages before or been exposed to more than two or three people), expert animal handlers must be present. A sufficient number of trained volunteers must be housed in local hotels and provided with meals.

For puppy mills with more than 100 dogs, at least 50 people per day may be required (veterinarians, expert animal handlers, vet techs, disaster specialists, and volunteers) to handle the animals and all the associated work.

Staffing needs include security; crime scene documentation; animal transfer and transport; photography and transcription for evidence purposes; veterinarians and vet techs to examine each animal and document criminal violations; daily care, feeding, and cage cleaning several times per day; supplies acquisition and management; groomers and groomer assistants; and staff for loading and driving trucks. Some cases may also involve health department personnel (due to the extreme unsanitary conditions found at most puppy mills) and mental health and child protective agencies.

Supplies: Necessary supplies include trucks, fuel, vehicle insurance, cages, leashes, toys, cage liner pads, bowls, food, water, electricity, water, office supplies for keeping records on and near each animal; animal handling gear; protective clothing; communications equipment; film and cameras; grooming supplies; and provisions for staff such as meals and first aid supplies, sanitation equipment, and human and animal medications.

Building: One large building is usually required to house the animals pending the legal hearing and custody decision, and as a staging area to physically examine, properly and legally document, and prepare the animals for transfer to appropriate shelters and approved rescue groups throughout the country. Sufficient ventilation, heating or cooling, health and environmental considerations, proper zoning considerations, office area and computer capabilities, electricity, parking, and bathroom facilities for humans are required.

For more information, contact The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037, www.humanesociety.org.

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