Shelter workers talk about euthanasia
by Bill Smith

Smith is director of The Animal Control Academy.

Personal emotion is a very real factor to be faced by those involved in the process of euthanizing shelter animals.

In February The Animal Control Academy, a joint program of The HSUS and the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, held its first Euthanasia Technician Certification Program. Twenty-six participants gathered to share their feelings on euthanasia.

There are many advantages to a meeting such as this. The worker realizes that he or she is not alone. "Understanding" does not seem to be forthcoming from the public, from family, even from fellow workers at times. It is helpful to meet with others who perform the same task on a regular basis and deal honestly with the subject.

Continued on page 2
It is acceptable, indeed mentally healthy, to face, to admit, and even to exhibit such emotions. It is also acceptable and possible to perform this task in pleasing surroundings and with a pleasant attitude of professionalism.

Facing the issue and resolving to perform this task professionally is only one part of the process -- shall there be a realization that a dramatic community awareness program must be undertaken. The public must understand who causes, and therefore who can solve, the overpopulation epidemic.

Euthanasia personnel know that, although unpleasant, it is kindness to humanely dispatch the unwanted animal. It is not fair that, as well as having the surplus animals delivered to them, they be blamed for the deaths of these animals.

Here are some of the students' comments:

"I think that euthanasia is necessary to relieve the suffering of unwanted and homeless animals. I think this as I see it being done, and I usually can deal with it. However, sometimes tears come to my eyes, and I get angry at the people who make us do what we have to do."

"It is difficult for me to go through the kennel and be the one who decides which will live and which will die."

"Who am I to play God and make such decisions? What gives me the right? I remember, however, that if I didn't cared, if I didn't love those unfortunate unwanted animals, who would? I may be the only kind hand they ever feel, the only soft voice they ever hear, the one and only human who really did care."

"My major concern is not knowing, not really knowing, the thought of the animals when being subjected to euthanasia, what trauma do they feel?"

"I want people to understand the anxiety and sadness I feel when I must euthanize an animal."

"I have trouble at times with my relatives. They sometimes ask why I do the job I do, and why we can't find homes for all the animals."

"I feel alienated from people who are my friends but who can't understand the reasons. They see the dilemma but cannot accept that I would do such a thing."

"I can't stand the feeling of death in my hands."

"I thought a lot about euthanasia my first three months at the humane society and I learned to control my feelings...I feel it! But I can live with it."
The language of such legislation should be simple and to the point. For example, the law in Virginia, the first passed in the country, says: "The Board shall issue, upon such terms and conditions as it finds proper, to any humane society, which shall make application therefor, a limited permit only for the purpose of buying, possessing and using sodium pentobarbital to euthanize injured, sick, homeless and unwanted domestic pets and animals."

The requirements for the shelter cover recordkeeping, storage of the drug and proficiency requirements for those administering the drug.

In states which have sodium pentobarbital laws, the shelter applies for a permit from the state authority for controlled substances (usually, the board of pharmacy). The public library will have a listing of state government offices where the proper agency can be located.

Once the permit is obtained, the shelter should contact the Drug Enforcement Administration at one of the regional offices listed below to get a DEA number and the official order forms. The forms then are used to order sodium pentobarbital from the manufacturer of the shelter's choice.

DEA Northeastern Region, 555 West 57th St., New York, NY 10019,
tel. (212)599-5131 (serves CT, DE, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)

DEA Southeastern Region, 8400 NW 53rd St., Miami, FL 33166,
tel. (305)591-4880 (serves AL, AR, DC, FL, GA, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA)

DEA North Central Region, 1800 Dirksen Federal Bldg., 219 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60604, tel. (312)353-1254 (serves IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO, NE, OH, SD, WI, WY)

DEA South Central Region, 1880 Regal Row, Dallas, TX 75235,
tel. (214)767-7203 (serves AZ, CO, NM, OK, TX, UT, WY)

DEA Western Region, 350 S. Figueroa St., Suite 800, Los Angeles, CA 90071, tel. (213)688-5225 (serves AK, CA, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, WA)

Any inquiries about obtaining sodium pentobarbital can be directed to these regional offices.

Good results from change

In recent months, The HSUS has received reports of shortages of sodium pentobarbital. Production of the drug is controlled by the DEA and is based on estimates of projected use. As more and more shelters have switched to sodium pentobarbital injection from other euthanasia methods, DEA has increased production quotas. DEA also tries to anticipate increased need for the drug, and no shortages are expected.

Clearly, the passage of state laws allowing animal shelters to obtain sodium pentobarbital directly makes it easier for shelters to use the euthanasia method The HSUS has long advocated as the most humane. However, where no such state law is in force, shelters can still obtain the sodium pentobarbital with minimum difficulty through a cooperating veterinarian.

In Warren County, OH, the animal control program switched from high altitude decompression to sodium pentobarbital injection for animal euthanasia. Program Coordinator Jan Thomas describes the reaction of the staff and the public:

The changes in the staff's attitudes toward their job were apparent immediately. A new pride in the shelter and its function within the community began to be evident.

The public response to the new method was, however, the most surprising and promising to me. In the research stages of our investigation into alternative methods, I was told repeatedly that no one cared anyway -- that as long as you kept the dogs off their property, they didn't care what you did with them. The exact opposite is the case. Many citizens have called to compliment us on the new program; some stop me in stores or on the street. Others bring animals to the shelter with comments like, "I now feel okay about bringing strays here because at least if they have to die, it will be humanely."

Continued on page 6
Publicity about the shelter and all of our programs increased dramatically almost immediately. Every major media outlet in our area came to us for stories, and we sensed a new respect from them for the more professional and humane approach we were taking to control our problems. From a public relations standpoint, our move to sodium pentobarbital has been great.

I'm sure lots has been written about how much better the procedure is for the animals -- it's time efficient and not at all as messy as our decompression chamber.

After having used the procedure for several months now, we are of the opinion that this is the best method for us and for our animals.

Never Stray Pet Tags is interested in promoting their products by paying for ads in local humane society newsletters. For complete details and information on the tags, write Robert Wilson, Never Stray Pet Tags, PO Box 532, Hatboro, PA 19040.

"Heat Kills - Protect Children and Pets" is the title of a poster being offered by Volunteers for Animal Welfare, Inc., PO Box 20061, Oklahoma City, OK 73156. The poster is 11" x 17" and includes space for your organization's name and address. The cost is 30¢ each (minimum order of 10) plus 50¢ postage per order.

The American Boarding Kennels Association has published a national directory of businesses which pick up and deliver pets at the major airports. The directory includes tips for pet owners who are shipping pets, a listing of state requirements for immunization of pets being shipped and the official USDA requirements for shipping crates for pets. For a copy, send $1 to ABKA, 311 North Union, Colorado Springs, CO 80909.

"The Dog and Cat Owners' Survival Manual" is the title of a new attractive publication developed by Pets in Need, 585 Glenwood Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025. It includes information on what to do when a pet is lost, why neutering is important and how to find a good owner for a pet that can no longer be cared for, along with a listing of local animal services. Pets in Need will send you a sample copy free on request.

A sample copy of the Brevard County Animal Control Officers Training Manual is available free while supplies last. Send your request to John Hurdle, Chairman, Board of County Commissioners, Brevard County, PO Box 1496, Titusville, FL 32780.

HSUS received promotional literature for Skunk-Off, made by Developments Incorporated. An area woman tested the product when her dog had what the literature describes as a "close encounter of the worst kind" with a skunk. She says the product works. For ordering information, write Developments Incorporated, 2509 Browncroft Blvd., Rochester, NY 14625.

Disaster Relief: Are You Prepared?" is the title of a talk given by Bill Garrett, Executive Director of the Atlanta Humane Society. He will send you a copy of the talk if you send him a stamped, self-addressed envelope at 981 Howell Mill Rd. NW, Atlanta, GA 30318.

The Quaker Oats Company is offering kits of materials for "Aunt Jemima Pancake Day," a fundraiser for local non-profit organizations. The supply kit includes pancake mix, place settings and other items -- the promotional kit has posters, banners and ad "slicks." Both kits are available at low cost -- but first, send for the free Pancake Day Guide from Aunt Jemima Pancake Day, PO Box 8533, Clinton, IA 52736. The guide gives complete information on the kits and includes a thorough step-by-step guide for holding a Pancake Day.

"The Prolific Dog" is a poster now available for $1 from Tom Browe. Rutland County humane Society, Stevens Rd., Pittsford, VT 05763. It illustrates with cartoon that 4,372 offspring can result from just one mating pair in seven generations.

Step by Step Management of the Volunteer Program in Agencies," a booklet mentioned in the February issue of SHELTER SENSE, is now available for $5.00 per copy from Volunteer Bureau of Bergen County, Inc., 389 Main St., Hackensack, NJ 07601. The group has received many orders from humane societies but had to raise the price $1.


The HSUS offers the following publications on animal euthanasia:

- How to Administer Sodium Pentobarbital for Small Animal Euthanasia ... one free, each additional 25¢;
- Carbon Monoxide Euthanasia (for the small shelter) ... 25¢;
- Why The HSUS Is Opposed to the Use of the High Altitude Decompression Chamber for Animal Euthanasia ... 50¢;
- Euthanasia of Cats and Dogs (Institute for the Study of Animal Problems) ... $3, 10 or more copies $2.50 each.

WANTED -- Investigator to work in large urban area investigating animal abuse complaints, mostly involving domestic animals but livestock complaints not uncommon. Police background or training desirable but not necessary; veterinary paramedical training or experience required. Send handwritten cover letter, resume and references to David K. Mills, Michigan Humane Society, 1700 Brown Rd., Pontiac, MI 48055.
The following feeding tips for shelters were sent to SHELTER SENSE by Martin’s Feed Mills, Inc., of New Paris, IN:

1) Shelters can obtain much more nutritional value for the food dollar by buying dry pet food. This would meet the standards of the National Research Council. Moist foods are much more costly.

2) Dry food may be moistened but should not be left in the food bowls for more than a few hours since it becomes a good growth medium for harmful molds and bacteria. Puppies are especially susceptible to these toxins.

3) Shelter animals accustomed to slim rations should be given their daily food amount in two separate feedings. This allows their digestive systems to become accustomed gradually to a quality diet and prevents upset.

4) Puppies should be fed for good nutrition and not necessarily the fastest growth. Research indicates that slowing growth in puppies can reduce the incidence of hip dysplasia. Feeding puppies four times daily will help increase digestive efficiency and prevent them from stuffing themselves at any one time.

5) Since new pet owners often contact the local animal shelter for guidance on pet feeding, your shelter should have a nutritional and economical feeding program to suggest.

Shelters should also have written nutrition and general care guidelines to give to each pet adopter. A sample of the food the animals have been fed at the shelter should also be provided, to maintain consistency in diet and lessen the stress of being moved to a new home. Some of the pet food companies make sample packages available to shelters – check with your pet food distributor.

**Fedding tips**

**Items...**

**Help for pet owners**

A committee of concerned people in Euclid, OH, is developing a new animal control program for the community. Started by City Humane Officer Richard F. Kirschling, the Citizens’ Pet Responsibility Committee includes members of the city council and other officials and private citizens.

Using successful programs from other areas, the group is setting up a reduced fee spay/neuter program with local veterinarians, working with the board of education for pet care programs in the schools and supporting humane legislation. The city will provide land for a new shelter to replace the present inadequate facility, and donations are being collected for the building.

In his proposal to form the committee, Kirschling stated, "I firmly believe that through a cooperative effort on the part of citizens, local government, and area veterinarians, Euclid could be committed to solving its animal concerns in a truly humane way." (CPRC, PO Box 4117, Euclid, OH 44123)

During a recent visit to HSUS headquarters, Linda Wildman, Director of the Humane Society of Larimer County, CO, reported positive results from providing follow-up help for pet adopters. Wildman ensures that the society takes time to help new owners with any behavior problems or questions that come up. She says the pet owners are impressed with the extra attention and help they receive. Also, there are fewer unsuccessful adoptions as a result of the program because the problems that might lead to the animal being returned to the shelter are solved. (Humane Society of Larimer County, Box 373, Ft. Collins, CO 80522)

Ambulance crews in Mishawaka, IN, sometimes had problems treating injured patients because of household pets trying to protect their owners from strangers. The problem has been solved with a workshop in humane dog handling at the St. Joseph County Humane Society (2506 Liberty Dr., Mishawaka, IN 46544); the society will send you guidelines on conducting this kind of workshop.

One of the medical technicians said her attitude toward this problem was completely altered when she learned how the protective dogs could be handled quickly and humanely so the owner could be treated.

**Emergency!**
Montgomery County Humane Society, Inc. (1420 East Gude Dr., Rockville, MD 20850) has ticketed violators of the animal control law for several years. In a program getting underway, first offenders can avoid the $25 fine by attending a one-evening training session in animal control offered at the shelter. They receive a certificate to be given to the district attorney who then nullifies the fine.

The City of Independence, MO, has included this idea in its animal control ordinance -- animal control violators may be sent with their pets to dog obedience school, just as drivers are allowed to work out their fines by attending driver education classes.

Local governments accept contributions

The North Carolina Humane Federation reports that the Watauga County Humane Society, with only 35 active members, has formulated an animal control policy for the county, assisted with examinations for prospective dog wardens, made improvements to the shelter, run information booths in the community and saved $500 to subsidize a neutering program. An organization is never too small to make real progress in the community.

Mendocino County, CA, Division of Animal Control has announced the opening of a special public education and awareness trust fund. The division will accept donations from the public to fund training programs and production of films and literature to educate the community about humane and responsible pet ownership.

In a similar program, the Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation administers the Animal Sterilization Fund, which pays for neutering pets from low income families. The fund was opened with a generous contribution from the estate of a concerned citizen who also was instrumental in securing the passage of the city ordinance establishing the fund.

Many local animal control agencies are reluctant to accept donations from individuals for animal programs, but these funds can make many worthwhile programs possible.

Pets-Supplies-Marketing Magazine reports a new theory that fleas were winged at one time. Because dogs and cats could feel the wings, the process of evolution caused the wings to be replaced by powerful hind legs. The cat flea can leap up to 36 inches -- the same as a person leaping over the Washington Monument.

The Wake County SPCA (503 Highway 70 East, Garner, NC 27529) got some expert instruction on how to handle fire emergencies from a former fire chief who conducted a class for shelter employees. They learned how to combat different kinds of fire and how to handle a fire extinguisher.

Shelters should prepare and "rehearse" procedures for fire and other emergencies, including establishing a proper holding area for animals that are removed from a shelter. (See "Materials" for a resource on emergency preparedness.)
When Tri-Agency humane officers come across an example of responsible pet ownership, such as walking the dog on a leash, the owner is given an "RPO" button and then mailed a Certificate of Responsibility along with a gift certificate donated by a local business. The local radio station announces the "RPO for the Day."

The agency reports that many pet owners have been surprised that their contact with an animal control officer could be such a positive experience. The public image of the animal control officers is significantly improved. (Tri-Agency Animal Regulation Authority, 3970 West 1st St., Eugene, OR 97402)

More tickets, fewer dogs

The Animal Commission in Cambridge, MA, has brought about a significant decline in the number of free-roaming dogs in the city with a stepped-up enforcement effort.

In the first two months of the effort, the city dog officer issued more than 300 citations in the city of 102,000 people. He picks up about 65 dogs per month. The courts have also cooperated in issuing warrants for pet owners who fail to pay their fines. The result has been fewer loose dogs plus cleaner streets and sidewalks.

To inform the public about the extent of animal problems, the Commission also prepared a brochure on its activities and programs which was mailed out in electric bills one month through the courtesy of the electric company. (City of Cambridge, Animal Commission, 51 Inman St., Cambridge, MA 02139)

Cruelty conviction

A Cleveland Heights woman has been fined $300 plus court costs and given a sentence of 30 days (suspended) and one year inactive probation for letting her dog starve and then freeze to death last winter.

Animal wardens answered a call from the woman to pick up her dead dog, and they found the animal in a poorly constructed dog house frozen to the floor in its own saliva. An autopsy confirmed the cause of death as starvation, water deprivation and exposure to cold weather. The wardens also obtained reports from the National Weather Service to verify weather conditions for the court. The owner said she had taken the dog to a veterinarian, but a check with local veterinarians disproved that claim.

With careful checking and follow-up, the conviction was obtained. (City of Cleveland Heights, Harry C. Dodge, Chief Animal Warden, 2953 Mayfield Rd., Cleveland Heights, OH 44118)

A trip to the country

The Humane Society of Huron Valley (3100 Cherry Hill Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105) holds Dog Outings in rural, open areas, where urban pet owners can allow their dogs to run and play off lead. HSHV reports that a number of participating pet owners have become members and volunteers at the shelter.

While many organizations start with a newsletter for members and supporters and then expand to a magazine, Marin Humane Society has started publishing a quarterly 6-page newsletter to replace a 32-page magazine. The newsletter is being sent to a mailing list of twice as many people as the magazine and did bring in new members on its first mailing in the spring.

In discussing the change, Marin's Barbara McVilieen mentioned a common concern of non-profit charitable groups that their publications be modern enough to attract attention without appearing so expensive that the organization doesn't seem to need support. (Marin Humane Society, 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd., Novato, CA 94947)

An Animal Control Officer from the City of Oak Ridge, TN, has attended The Animal Control Academy, courtesy of the city and the Humane Society there (PO Box 3434, Oak Ridge, TN 37830). The society donated $250 as a scholarship for an officer and the city provided matching funds.

In another story from Oak Ridge which began earlier this year, a dog owner's homeowners insurance policy has paid more than $300 to repair damage done to a car when the driver hit and killed the pet which was running loose. The company paid when it was shown that the city has a leash law which is regularly enforced.

One of the people involved in the case commented that if pet owners were aware that they might be responsible for damages such as this, "they would keep their animals under the supervision required by law."

The Nevada Humane Society lent a hand at the Nevada State Prison recently when cats that were being kept as pets by the inmates began to create a severe overcrowdation problem at the prison. As Mark McGuire, NHS Chief Cruelty Investigator, put it, "The inmates who had finally found an outlet for emotional feelings ... were about to lose what for many of them may well have been the only object for their compassion available to them."

NHS volunteered to pick up the cats and take them to veterinarians for neutering and vaccinations, including covering the cost of the veterinary care. The inmates turned 13 pet cats over to NHS employees, and the pets were returned to their owners a week later. NHS made a follow-up check after 10 days for suture removal.

A thank-you letter received from the state department of prisons said the inmates were "especially grateful, for now they are able to retain the pets that offer them some degree of personal identity."

The company paid when it was
“Why Can’t You Keep Them Forever?”

Why can't animal shelters keep indefinitely the animals that do not get adopted?

It's because dogs and cats need the companionship of people. Even if public and private shelters could afford to house and feed these animals through their lifetimes, making them live in cages day in and day out with only occasional human contact is stressful and cruel. It can even cause nervous disorders and other illnesses.

We are working to bring the pet population under control so that each animal might have a responsible home. But for the unwanted animals in our care now, a peaceful death is the kindest way we have to end their loneliness and suffering.

Prepared by The Humane Society of the United States for animal welfare groups and animal control agencies.

The message above can be clipped out and reproduced in quantity by your local printer for you to distribute at schools, shopping centers, libraries and other community locations. Remember to add your organization’s name, address, and telephone number in the space by typing, typesetting or affixing your group letterhead. You can also purchase advertising space in your local newspapers for the reproducible or use it in your organization’s newsletter or magazine.

Euthanasia. It's the most difficult subject on any animal shelter agenda.

Shelter workers must combine an objectivity about destroying surplus animals with a sensitivity toward each individual dog and cat that comes into their care. It's not an easy balance.

The objectivity comes in recognizing that until the pet population can be brought under control, millions of dogs and cats will have to be euthanized annually...that the best we can do for them is to give them a peaceful death.

From time to time, concerned people will call my office to ask about starting an animal refuge that "won't ever have to kill any animals.”

We explain that there are shelters raising considerable funds with the glorious claim that they do not kill any animals. But those shelters simply don't take in animals that are not healthy, attractive, young and otherwise immediately adoptable.

The old animals, the sick, the homely and bedraggled are shunted away to another shelter or pound which then gets the "bad press" for destroying them.

The staff members who euthanize animals must have resolved in their own minds the seeming paradox that euthanasia is in fact the kindest end for homeless animals. Once everyone understands that policy, the next step is to design the best possible program for the animals euthanized and the staff responsible for euthanizing them.

The selection of the staff members who will euthanize is critical. Some people may be too emotional about animals to handle the job and will be of greater service in other assignments.

On the other hand, people who appear to be unaffected or too glib about the euthanasia process may not have the sensitivity to treat the animals with the necessary care and concern.

Proper training is essential. Some shelters have developed training programs in cooperation with local veterinarians. The three-day euthanasia program offered at The Animal Control Academy is discussed elsewhere in this issue.

Euthanasia technicians must be observed continually, preferably with unannounced visits from the shelter administrator or veterinarian. If a person who has been handling the job satisfactorily suddenly shows signs of stress, fatigue or insensitivity toward the animals, he or she should stop performing euthanasia.

But those individuals must also be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings and problems with staff managers and other employees. If the shelter invests some time in helping a troubled employee, the effort will pay off in getting a good euthanasia technician back on the job.

The physical facility for euthanasia has a great deal to do with the attitude of the employees. The room should be well-lighted and have a cheerful atmosphere; calming background music can be beneficial. The room should be in the center of the shelter or located in such a way that the animals do not have to be led or carried long distances. For the animals' sake, never lead them past carcasses of other animals. Gentle, quiet handling without rushing is the key.

Continued on next page.
Unfortunately, surplus animal euthanasia is one of the shelter's biggest public relations problems. We have all heard from unknowing citizens who accuse us of being "the ones who kill all the dogs and cats." A variation of this is: "We brought our litter to the humane society instead of the pound because the humane society will find homes for them and the pound will kill them."

In a Washington suburb recently, the public and press became outraged because of a beagle, rescued from traffic and taken to a shelter, which would be euthanized if a suitable adopter within the shelter's jurisdiction could not be found. Except for the beleaguered shelter director, everyone quoted expressed a total lack of understanding of adoption requirements and spoke as if the beagle were the only animal at the shelter.

I am constantly amazed by reporters who exploit the plight of a single animal while completely ignoring the millions destroyed annually at shelters -- but it's going to be a long time before the necessary changes in public thinking take place.

The best we can do in that area is to continue our public education programs.

But in the meantime, that public attitude makes it all the more important for shelter workers to resolve in their own minds that euthanasia is the only solution for now and to ensure that the animals do get a humane death.

It is all the more important for shelter workers to find ways to share thoughts and feelings with each other, to get a sympathetic ear, since even their own friends and family may not be able to relate to these experiences.

In this issue of SHELTER SENSE, we have talked about some aspects of animal euthanasia. This is certainly not the last word on the subject, but we hope it will help you cope with this most difficult part of our work.