



# AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

## *American Humane Humane Euthanasia of Shelter Animals Fact Sheet*

### **1. Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) is the safest way for humans to euthanize shelter animals.**

- The American Humane Association has been directly involved in training shelter euthanasia technicians on properly administering euthanasia by injection for decades. This on-site assistance has definitively shown that EBI is the safest and only humane way to euthanize shelter animals.
- Carbon monoxide poses a danger to humans because it is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and highly explosive<sup>1</sup>. A gas chamber must be constantly checked and maintained to ensure no cracks in the structure or failing seals. When carbon monoxide is released in a confined area, it can cause asphyxiation, kidney damage, or induced coma.
- The gas chamber jeopardizes the safety of shelter workers. In 2009, gas build-up caused the door of the Lincoln County, North Carolina shelter to explode open; the incident put an animal control officer in the emergency room. In 2008, an explosion in the Iredell County, North Carolina Animal Services' gas chamber revealed that, contrary to recommendations, the equipment in the vicinity of the chamber was not explosion proof. A shelter worker was in the room at the time and other personnel were nearby. In 2000, a shelter worker in Tennessee was asphyxiated to death while operating a faulty gas chamber. And in 1997 a shelter veterinarian in Illinois was severely injured while operating a gas chamber. In contrast, there are no documented reports of any shelter worker being killed from an accidental injection of sodium pentobarbital.<sup>2</sup>
- The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) 2007 Guidelines on Euthanasia state: "*Carbon Monoxide is extremely hazardous for personnel because it is highly toxic and difficult to detect . . . The advantages of using barbiturates for euthanasia in small animals far outweigh the disadvantages. Intravenous injection of a barbituric acid derivative is the preferred method for euthanasia of dogs, cats, other small animals, and horses.*"<sup>3</sup>

### **2. EBI is the most humane method of euthanizing shelter animals.**

- IF successful, the gas chamber can take up to 25 to 30 minutes to end an animal's life, whereas EBI causes loss of consciousness within 3 to 5 seconds and clinical death within 2 to 5 minutes.<sup>4</sup> EBI causes animals to lose consciousness and brain function before their vital organs shut down. In a chamber, however, animals lose consciousness and brain function only after their vital organs shut down, causing prolonged suffering and distress.
- EBI is the method preferred by the National Animal Control Association,<sup>5</sup> the American Veterinary Medical Association,<sup>6</sup> the Association of Shelter Veterinarians,<sup>7</sup> and The Humane Society of the United States.
- Old, neonatal, and injured animals are often biologically unable to absorb the gas as readily as larger or healthier animals, which prolongs trauma and stress.<sup>8</sup>
- Birds and neonatal animals are commonly euthanized by using halothane or isoflurane anesthesia gas, followed by an intraperitoneal injection into the abdominal cavity. Birds are commonly euthanized via an oral injection of sodium pentobarbital. Using dioxide on these animals is unnecessary.

<sup>1</sup> See Christopher Henry, et al., *Myocardial Injury and Long-term Mortality Following Moderate to Severe Carbon Monoxide Poisoning*, (The Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol, 295, No. 4, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> "Sodium pentobarbital is not considered a health hazard to staff unless it is deliberately misused or handled incorrectly." (American Humane Association, *Operational Guide for Animal Care and Control Agencies: Euthanasia by Injection*, p. 19, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia, p.10-11. (2007).

<sup>4</sup> American Humane Association, *Euthanasia by Injection—Training Guide*, p. 8 (2008).

<sup>5</sup> See National Animal Control Policy Statement: Disposition of Animals—Euthanasia, at <http://www.nacanet.org/poleuth.html> .

<sup>6</sup> The AVMA 2007 Guidelines on Euthanasia state: "The use of injectable euthanasia agents is the most rapid and reliable method of performing euthanasia." (p. 11). See [http://www.avma.org/issues/animal\\_welfare/euthanasia.pdf](http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf) .

<sup>7</sup> Association of Shelter Veterinarians position statement on Euthanasia of Shelter Animals, at <http://www.sheltervet.org/documents/Position%20Statements/Euthanasia%20of%20Shelter%20Animals.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Grim, Randy, *Miracle Dog: How Quentin Survived the Gas Chamber to Speak for Animals on Death Row*, (Alpine Books, 2005, p. 27).

- The animals don't always die in gas chambers, as documented by the fact that a dog survived the St. Louis, MO Animal Regulation Center's gas chamber in 2003<sup>9</sup> and a puppy survived the Davie County, NC Animal Shelter's gas chamber in 2005.<sup>10</sup>
- Referring to the horrors of carbon monoxide, Doug Fakkema, the nation's animal euthanasia expert,<sup>11</sup> has stated: "[t]he animal is in a warm or hot box, usually with other animals. They don't know what is going on. The hiss of the gas is going on inside. They get dizzy, and then they panic. Fights can break out, and animals' calls can sometimes be heard."<sup>12</sup>

**3. It is dangerous to put aggressive and/or wild animals in the gas chamber. Sedation methods utilized with EBI are safer for shelter staff in cases of highly aggressive and wild animals, and more humane for those animals.**

It is much safer to sedate and then inject an aggressive animal instead of dragging it frantically into a gas chamber. Many common restraint methods do not require shelter workers to handle the animal themselves if the animal is deemed dangerous. These include: Restraint poles, squeeze gates, and syringe poles. Shelter workers can then anesthetize the animal with an intramuscular injection of pre-euthanasia drugs, followed by Sodium Pentobarbital once the animal is unconscious. If these restraint methods are not available, shelter workers can give aggressive and/or wild animals Sodium Pentobarbital by mouth by mixing its powder form (called Fatal Plus) with canned food or by squirting it into the animal's mouth. Once the animal is unconscious, they can administer a lethal dose of the drug.<sup>13</sup>

**4. Many states have passed laws prohibiting carbon dioxide and monoxide euthanasia of shelter animals.**

Currently, only nine states have laws that explicitly ban all forms of gassing for all types of animals in shelters (including ferals and wildlife): Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wyoming. Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Virginia have prohibited carbon dioxide and monoxide for shelter cats and dogs.

**5. EBI provides shelter workers the dignity they deserve when facing the difficult reality of euthanizing pets.**

American Humane's knows first-hand that most shelter workers wish to hold and comfort a frightened animal in its final moments of life. That act may be the only kindness the animal has ever known. In contrast, the gas chamber is both inhumane and demoralizing to the emotional and physical health of human beings and animals.

**6. A 2009 study by American Humane shows EBI is less costly than gas to communities.**

American Humane recently commissioned a study on the costs associated between EBI and gas. Using data from an animal sheltering organization in North Carolina, the number of dogs and cats euthanized in 2007 was 5,427. The study, which is applicable to other jurisdictions, shows that the cost to use carbon monoxide gas is \$4.98 per animal. The cost to use carbon monoxide poisoning without a tranquilizer is \$4.66 per animal. The cost to use EBI, however, was only \$2.29 per animal.<sup>14</sup> Cost figures from North Carolina are comparable to other states. Thus, EBI is more cost effective than gas.

For more information, please contact:

American Humane Association – Office of Public Policy  
703-836-7387 or [Publicpolicy@americanhumane.org](mailto:Publicpolicy@americanhumane.org)

<sup>9</sup> Id, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> See Gunning, Mike, *Puppy Survives Euthanasia Attempt, Trip To Dump*, at <http://www.freewebs.com/animalshelternews/index.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Doug Fakkema is a trainer and consultant for American Humane with over 35 years' experience in animal protection. He conducts euthanasia workshops around the country. See Doug Fakkema, *Comparison of Sodium Pentobarbital and Carbon Monoxide as Euthanasia Agents*. [www.crean.com/kindness/ebi-vs-co.html](http://www.crean.com/kindness/ebi-vs-co.html).

<sup>12</sup> Mott, Maryann. Animal Gas Chambers Draw Fire in U.S., National Geographic News, April 11, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Mr. Fakkema states: "I can euthanize a dangerous dog in his/her kennel by feeding sodium pentobarbital—no handling necessary." See <http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/06/10/carbongaschambers106.html>.

<sup>14</sup> January 2009; Doug Fakkema, Consultant to Animal Care & Control, Commissioned by American Humane Association. *Study available upon request.*