

PUPPY MILL CLOSURE: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON A LOCAL COMMUNITY

When a substandard breeding facility, a.k.a. puppy mill, is closed and all the dogs removed, this humane action can drain the financial resources of a local community, local animal welfare entities, as well as large humane organizations. A small town rarely derives any benefit from a puppy mill's existence. Substandard large breeding facilities employ few staff, often don't pay required taxes or license fees, and generate much animal waste – as well as causing unpleasant odors and sounds. Once a major puppy mill enterprise is discovered, it can be ignored or dealt with. But some communities don't have the necessary resources to handle the situation. Prevention is key as a community should discourage large scale breeding facilities from locating in their area.

One law enforcement official was brutally honest. He 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 a problem does not make it go away; it just perpetuates the suffering and allows additional breeding facilities to be created.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES:

Washington state Puppy Mill, June 2009 - The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recently facilitated the removal, emergency sheltering, and initial veterinary care for 371 dogs from a puppy mill in Washington state after the owner was charged with animal cruelty due to harboring sick animals in dilapidated housing. Private citizens 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 value of 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 Humane Society of the United States.

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 of approximately \$120,000** to us – not including the financial costs of the many other groups working with us, to the local community government or the costs associated with investigating the facility, filing charges and the upcoming long judicial process, nor of the many local animal shelters who received dogs from this facility, processed them, spayed/neutered and continued to handle medical problems, and found good homes. Approximately 50 people a day (experts and volunteers), numerous local, state and national humane organizations participated, and local law enforcement officials handled criminal aspects of the case as well as the increased traffic and security problems. HSUS incurred costs for renting a large building for the temporary shelter and all the expenses involved with that, medical issues, and housing and meals for humans in this rural area in addition to the direct costs for caring for the animals.

Carroll County, 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 approximately 1100 dogs after a local puppy breeding facility's conditions were exposed. Gary Larrowe, County Administrator, said in a February 2008 letter sent to Delegate Robert Orrock of the state legislature, "*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.

Assembly committee: NATRAM

Exhibit: F Page 1 of 4 Date: 05/12/11

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Larrowe's letter was 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.

Buxton, Maine Puppy Mill seizure, August 2007 through March 2008

249 animals seized, 102 more born during the case duration

6-7 weeks of sheltering the animals on the kennel property with round the clock security Animals transported to a temporary emergency shelter during mid October and spent another approximate 4-5 months there.

Total cost to the state of Maine- \$440,000 Two lead shelters, Animal Welfare Society and Animal Refuge League also fundraised for the effort and likely brought in around another \$30,000 that covered costs that would have otherwise been charged to the state.

The HSUS spent approximately \$40,000, which covered deployment of 5-6 NDART volunteers per day for the first six weeks of the case. Maine State Director spent approximately 8-10 weeks on site daily, and two other HSUS staff assisted as well. HSUS Emergency Services sent in a management team for a week long period and provided at least one responder for a couple weeks following the full week. Emergency Services also provided a team to prepare for and execute the set up of the temporary shelter and the transport of the animals to the new site. An HSUS large sheltering vehicle was used during the move. **Total costs: \$510,000.**

Sanford, North Carolina hoarder case, 2005 – 2006

325 dogs seized by the Animal Legal Defense Fund, held for 18 months in a temporary shelter and foster homes pending court case. Technically not a puppy mill, these animals were kept by hoarders under similar deplorable conditions. The number of dogs fluctuated as puppies were born during this time. During the first six months it took 15-20 volunteers working 3 shifts a day (covering 16 hours). There were large bills for utilities, propane heat, laundry, flooring, supplies and just making the building inhabitable, plus all the medical expenses and attorneys fees. Costs: At this time, not calculated.

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

PetSmart is one of the largest pet retail corporations in the world funds and it funds PetSmart Charities. This entity works with many major animal protection groups when man-made or natural disasters are handled. PetSmart Charities donates truckloads of supplies making it possible for puppy mills to be closed and the animals placed into humane settings. Food, strong cages, kitty litter, food and water bowls, disinfectants, puppy pads, and many other pet supplies are donated in a quick and efficient manner. This service is invaluable to groups such as 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 **\$1600** haul charge to the site. They usually provide four volunteers for a minimum of 4 days/4 nights and cover all expenses such as hotel, airfare, meals, car rentals, etc. For the Tennessee puppy mill event (see above), one and a half truckloads was sent. Left over supplies, including cages, are donated to local humane groups after the emergency situation is settled.

TIMELINE OF A TYPICAL PUPPY MILL SITUATION

At the beginning: When a breeding operation begins, the facility may be decent – a manageable number of dogs may be housed properly, receive adequate veterinary care, shelter, food, water, and exercise. But as the number of animals increases dramatically, standards are lowered because the work involved is overwhelming and never ending. The local animal shelter may notice an increase in the number of young animals being turned in for adoption and also a lessening of potential adopters who have chosen to purchase from the breeder rather than from the animal shelter. They often believe these animals are preferable because they may be sold with AKC papers.

The first reports of animals living in unacceptable conditions are usually given by potential buyers to local humane societies, animal control or law enforcement officials. As a puppy mill increases in size, many dogs will be without adequate food, water or shelter, forced to share small cages and to live on wire floors. Veterinarians in the area notice an increase in the number of sick puppies brought to them indicative of poor breeding practices. Unfortunately, unless a facility is mandated to do so [special insert for new VA puppy mill law], law enforcement has no authority to inspect a structure. An investigator can visit a property, but the owner is under no obligation to let anyone in, to show any area that the person doesn't want

seen, or otherwise cooperate. (Add info on USDA licensed facilities?) Puppy mill operators often operate web sites showing idyllic conditions for their animals but in reality will not allow anyone to see where the majority of animals exist.

The dogs breed quickly, room gets tight so cages get full, food is expensive, adequate veterinary care is considered a luxury (a sick or dying dog can be easily replaced), hiring adequate staff to clean cages is difficult and expensive and is not considered a necessity. Plus there is the concern that a staff person might expose the cruel conditions to the public. (As a result, we suspect an upturn in the number of illegal aliens being hired.) All the dogs live caked in feces; although the puppies are finally cleaned and groomed when placed for sale. The breeding mothers spend their entire lives in cramped cages churning out litters. Animals develop all sorts of medical and behavioral problems, the animals are suffering and an unhealthy environment exists for both animals and people. In addition, taxes are not being paid to the local government entities.

The facility needs to be shut down. Unfortunately, closure doesn't happen as often as it should due to the incredible expense of such an effort.

Closing Down a Substandard Facility: Extensive time is needed to investigate a facility and document the problems. Dealing with 300, 500 or a 1,000 dogs is a massive and expensive undertaking. Specially equipped trucks, hundreds of cages, food, water, medical supplies, cleaning supplies, bowls, feces disposal essentials and other supplies must be brought to the site. Professional dog handlers, veterinarians and veterinary technicians are required as well as animal experts assisted by numerous volunteers. A separate facility, (i.e., warehouse or fairgrounds) is usually needed to place the animals once they are removed from the breeding facility – costs for utilities, rent, and insurance are incurred. Animals are usually transported from the area on trucks thus incurring high fuel bills. No local animal shelter will be able to meet the immediate needs of this large number of animals. In addition, food and lodging may be needed for the many essential volunteers and experts.

When dogs are removed, each animal has to be carefully documented, photographed, examined for medical problems, given necessary vaccinations and flea/tick medication, and found a new shelter or foster family. The new shelter will incur the expense transporting the dogs hundreds of miles, (staff, vehicle use, fuel costs) as well as of caring for the dogs and will ensure they are spayed or neutered before finally being adopted to a new home.

When there is a possibility of criminal charges being brought, the expenses increase substantially as even more time is required so that more care to detail is given. Yet 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 exists, the local community can be forced to house and care for the animals for months or more than a year pending court action. The costs associated with such a large undertaking can be staggering and be larger than the entire local government budget.

The Solution States and local communities should prohibit, by state statute or ordinance, the existence of any breeding facility with more than 50 adult dogs and should require all breeding facilities to be regularly inspected. Once more dogs are allowed to breed, a large substandard facility is almost inevitable. When inhumane conditions are exposed, citizens demand that the suffering is stopped in spite of financial considerations.

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 facility?

First, the animals are living in horrible conditions and must be moved immediately and given extensive medical care. The humane transportation to a temporary shelter and then to shelters throughout the country of so many animals involves very large trucks specially equipped with proper heating, cooling, and venting as well as sturdy and appropriate cages. Because the animals are so stressed by this process (many have never left their cages before nor been exposed to more than 2-3 people), expert animal handlers must be present. Fuel is costly. Veterinarians, vet techs, examination rooms and

equipment, and medical supplies are expensive – even when many services and supplies are donated. The number of individuals involved is large with many having to come from out of the area. This happens for several reasons: to keep the legal investigation quiet, to bring in expert staff, and to find a sufficient number of trained volunteers who must be housed in local hotels and provided with food and drink.

Manpower: At a minimum, 50 people per day (veterinarians, expert animal handlers, vet techs, disaster specialists, and volunteers) are needed to handle the animals and all the associated work. Ideally, the following manpower is used: crime scene documentation and animal transfer 40, (ten teams of 4 people); animal transport 40, (ten teams of 4 people); 8-10 people to document (photograph, document, place into new caging) the animals as approximately 100 animals at a time are brought to the new facility; a minimum of 4 veterinarians with vet techs to examine each animal and document criminal violations; 40 people total, with 1 person per every 15-20 animals to handle daily care, feeding, cage cleaning per day; animal export requires a team of 5 for each group taking animals if more than 50 animals are in the group – for paperwork, placing animals into crates, loading and driving trucks and for transportation long distances. .

Supplies: Necessary supplies include: trucks, fuel, insurance, etc., suitable for carrying animals safely, cages, bowls, food, water, electricity, water supply, medical supplies.

Building: One large building is usually required as a staging area to physically examine, properly and legally document, and prepare the animals for transfer to appropriate shelters or rescues (?) throughout the country. Sufficient ventilation, heating or cooling, health and environmental considerations, proper zoning considerations, office area and computer capabilities, electricity, parking, bathroom facilities and a proper eating area for humans are required.

Not included: hours spent by experts investigating suspected law violations; hours spent making arrangements to bring together all the groups, volunteers, vets, supplies, and a building site; costs to local shelters who agree to take in a portion of these animals such as transportation, feeding, spay/neuter surgery and numerous adoptions; costs to prosecute case; and follow-up on welfare of animals.

Cost Checklist – To summarize, when a puppy mill is closed, costs associated with the following are usually incurred:

- ___ County or city government forced to cover cost of renting holding facility and caring for animals pending court disposition
- ___ Veterinarians, vet technicians, medical supplies
- ___ Animal control personnel, use of the shelter facilities and supplies
- ___ Prosecutorial staff investigating crime, coordinating with police, case prosecution
- ___ Police or sheriff involvement during initial investigation, facility closure, handling traffic, crime site management, new holding facility security
- ___ Judicial system costs
- ___ Local humane societies that use limited resources on a problem deliberately caused by an irresponsible breeder
- ___ Consumers who purchase animals from a puppy mill often incur high veterinary bills (as well as emotional distress)
- ___ Local animal shelters have to deal with increased populations of dogs and may lose adopters who buy animals instead
- ___ Health Department personnel may become involved due to the extreme unsanitary conditions found at most puppy mills
- ___ Large animal protection groups that send large vehicles for animal transport, specially needed supplies, personnel, forensic specialists and other expertise as needed

For more information contact The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, www.humanesociety.org