Is Your Pet Safe From Laboratory Experimentation?
Researches still claim need for shelter animals as test subjects

It was the week before Christmas, and Mrs. Bates thought it would be nice if she went down to her local shelter and groomed the dogs so they might have a better chance of being adopted. When she arrived at the Hardin County (Ohio) dog pound, she found the waiting room “packed full” of people waiting for adoption hours to start. Many had seen ads in the local paper the day before and had already picked out the animals they wanted. But the prospective pet owners went home that day both disappointed and horrified. While they sat and waited for the arrival of the dog warden, another visitor had come and gone. The visitor was a local “buncher,” who operated under an agreement with the pound. This man came in, took all the dogs he thought he could resell to research laboratories, and euthanized the rest. “When he left,” said Mrs. Bates, “All that was left was a couple of coon dog puppies. But before he got there, there were enough adopters to have given homes to all the animals.

Unfortunately, the buncher from Hardin County is still operating. However, thanks to the efforts of The HSUS’s Great Lakes Regional Office, another major dealer has been temporarily put out of business after an Ohio judge granted an injunction against him. That dealer had also been routinely removing animals from pounds and shelters, taking what he thought he could sell to labs in exchange for euthanizing the rest. The fight continues to prevent dealers from using animal shelters as a cheap source of subjects for research laboratories.

In the U.S., the path from public or private shelters to laboratories is tread too often by dogs and cats. In a few states, so-called “pound seizure” laws require shelters to turn over unclaimed or unwanted dogs and cats to
researchers. In other states, shelters may voluntarily sell dogs and cats to "bunchers" who travel around a state or states, bunching animals together to resell to research facilities. Even in the handful of states that prohibit release of animals for research purposes, unscrupulous profit seekers can find animals and sell them for research across state lines.

Many scientists claim these "random source" animals from shelters are stray dogs, not pets. But in Ohio, the required holding period for a stray animal is only three days. We'll never know how many pets were sacrificed in research labs while their frantic owners were still vainly searching for them!

Since the scientific explosion following World War II, dogs and cats from animal shelters have been more extensively used for experimentation and research. In their quest for inexpensive research subjects, scientists pressured state legislators to pass pound seizure laws, systematically forcing shelters to turn over animals to satisfy growing research demands.

However, the animal welfare movement, the general public, and even some scientists have become more vocal in their questioning of what happens to the animals sentenced to laboratory experimentation. The successful push for funds to develop a non-animal alternative to the Draize eye-irritancy test and other experiments; the 1981 conviction for animal cruelty of Maryland researcher Edward Taub; and increasing awareness of the atrocities laboratory animals are routinely—and frequently needlessly—subjected to, have eroded the influence that the nation's research community has on some legislators.

We had hoped the animal welfare movement was winning the fight to spare shelter animals the terrors of biomedical experimentation. In 1979, after a ten-year fight, the New York state legislature repealed its pound seizure law. Since then, Wisconsin, Connecticut, and Iowa have repealed or modified similar laws. But repeal of pound seizure laws is not enough. We need legislation prohibiting any release of shelter animals to anyone other than their owners or legitimate adopters.

The research community is not abandoning its convenient and expedient pound seizure without a fight. Barely a month after The HSUS win in the Ohio court ruling, a state legislator introduced a bill to make it easier for researchers to obtain pound and shelter animals. In California, where our regional office is working as part of a broad-based coalition for passage of a bill designed to outlaw such access, some of that state's most powerful medical lobbies are raising funds to block the bill from enactment.

Only when ALL FIFTY STATES PROHIBIT release of pound and shelter animals can you be sure your dog or cat won't have to give his or her life for "science."

WHAT IS POUND SEIZURE?

The term " pound seizure" is frequently misused and misunderstood. Actual pound seizure laws REQUIRE pounds or shelters to release any state or municipal funds to turn unclaimed dogs and cats over to researchers on demand. Currently, only Massachusetts and Minnesota have pound seizure laws on the books.

A few states, including Pennsylvania, Maine, Hawaii, and Rhode Island, expressly forbid any release of shelter animals for research purposes. However, animals from these states can and do turn up in labs in other states.

Most other states have no laws on the subject. Shelters or county governments make their own rules and set their own policies on how unclaimed or unwanted dogs and cats will be "disposed of." The HSUS's Recommended Animal Ordinance states, "Any animal not claimed by its owner within five working days shall become the property of the local government authority, or humane society, and shall be placed for adoption in a suitable home or humanely euthanized." This rules out animals becoming victims of researchers.

Animal Control suffers. By robbing shelters of their basic mandate to provide a haven for lost or unwanted animals, pound seizure undermines effective animal control. Instead of turning unwanted animals in to a shelter, people who fear the animals will be sent to labs may abandon them. For the same reason, people finding lost pets may not turn them in, making it impossible to reunite animals with owners.

Research results suffer. "When a dog that's used to regular exercise, individual food preferences, and a person's companionship is thrust into a laboratory surrounding, it suffers from severe stress," said Phyllis Wright, HSUS director of Animal Sheltering and Control. "That stress makes them more prone to disease and poor models for research."

In testifying before the Los Angeles City Council on a bill to outlaw pound seizure, the HSUS's Dr. Andrew Rowan likened using stray animals in research to using rodents found in a city dump. "...The dictates of good science... require that scientists abandon the random source animals as a research tool."

Said the dean of the University of the Washington School of Medicine: "I think it is possible that at one point in the history of research there was some justification for the use of the semi-starved and anemic, worm-ridden pound animal or random rabbit. I think it is also likely that many of the experiments of the past were conducted on animals too sickly or run-down to serve as adequate biological tools...."

More and more scientists are admitting that "random source" animals from shelters simply do not make good research subjects.

Don't let them fool you into believing research would come to a grinding halt if scientists' access to shelter animals were ended. Research flourishes in Sweden, where use of random-source animals was outlawed in 1979. Simi-
lar legislation is in the works all over Europe where the use of these animals has nearly ended.

Animals suffer. As long as dogs and cats can be obtained at such a cheap price and in such great quantities from shelters, there will be no impetus for researchers to develop testing methods using fewer or no animals. Easily-acquired, easily disposed-of animals may also foster the belief among science students that animal life is cheap.

What HSUS Is Doing

With this report, The HSUS is alerting its members to the growing fight to prevent even more pet animals from falling into the hands of researchers. On the national, state, and local levels, The HSUS is calling for a concerted effort to end pound seizure and outlaw the release of shelter dogs and cats for research purposes.

Here in Washington, D.C., we are pressuring the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to end all federal funding for research that would use shelter animals.

At the state and municipal levels, The HSUS’s Dr. Andrew Rowan, who holds a PhD in Biochemistry, has delivered expert testimony debunking pound seizure’s “necessity.” After he testified before the Los Angeles City Council, it approved an ordinance banning pound seizure in its city shelters by an eleven-to-one margin. We will continue to fight for such legislation.

Also on the local level, Phyllis Wright, HSUS director of Animal Sheltering and Control, is working for the adoption of HSUS’s Recommended Animal Ordinance, which contains a provision preventing release of animals for research.

In addition, our regional offices in Ohio, California, and Connecticut are marshalling programs to deal with the problem, whether by helping formulate and pass new laws or prosecuting bunchers selling dogs and cats illegally. We will not let up until all the nation’s pets are safe from the spectre of laboratory experimentation.

What You Can Do

You CAN help keep pet animals from being turned over to laboratories. Here are some ways:

- Be sure your pets have and wear identification. Tattooing them can prove they are not strays and reduce or eliminate their chances of ending up in a lab.
- Write to the National Institutes of Health (Dr. Thomas Malone, Acting Director, NIH, Bethesda, MD 20205). Urge NIH not to use taxpayers’ money to fund research that would exploit shelter animals. Use this report to draft your letter.
- Find out how your state views pound seizure. Your local librarian can help you find the laws. If there is no law, find out how your local shelter disposes of its animals. If unclaimed dogs and cats ARE going for research, you might approach a local government official to introduce an ordinance prohibiting it.
- The HSUS needs your help. Your tax-deductible contribution will help us continue this campaign against the use of shelter animals for research. At our headquarters in Washington, D.C., and in our regional offices across the country, The HSUS is fighting to protect pet animals from the tragic fate of life in a research laboratory. Your financial support will help us prepare and deliver testimony at legislative hearings in states where the path from shelter to lab is still a legal one, as well as helping us continue our public education programs. Help us protect your pet, and the pets of millions of others.