Baltimore Pound Gets Cleaned Up

Following a recent inspection tour of the Baltimore, Maryland City Pound, HSUS investigator, Phil Steward called the facility a "Hell Hole". Front page stories of Steward’s visit resulted in a clean up operation backed by the power of the Mayor’s office. Steward’s investigation was prompted by a request of Citizens for Animals, a local animal welfare group.

The “deplorable conditions” Steward witnessed during his initial visit on August 14 prompted him to notify William Donald Schaefer, Baltimore’s Mayor, that “Your facility does not meet even minimum standards for the operation of a municipal animal shelter, and is, in fact, in direct and flagrant violation of the Annotated Code of Maryland. Additionally, your facility is, from my observations and discussions at the facility, in direct violation of your own city ordinances.”

Steward demanded that Mayor Schaefer “take immediate action to correct the conditions” and offered “to assist in correcting the cruel and inhume conditions at the animal shelter.” Steward’s request for a reply within 15 days was promptly met. Mayor Schaefer not only personally visited the shelter, but also dispatched one of his top aides, Joseph Coale, to determine the validity of HSUS’ complaints. With Coale’s verification, Mayor Schaefer assigned him to the shelter fulltime to see that corrective measures were undertaken and implemented as soon as possible.

Steward’s recommendations included the following: a thorough cleaning and repairing of the shelter; required training for shelter personnel; establishment of a first aid room staffed by a veterinarian for sick and or injured animals; the adjustment of their high altitude decompression chamber to meet minimum standards as set by the manufacturer; a continuous public education program to encourage the humane treatment of animals and the need for responsible pet ownership; and implementation of a complete and accurate records system.

By the end of October, steps were taken to see that all of the above recommendations were implemented. “The cooperation of everyone has been tremendous,” said Steward. “They turned a disgraceful situation completely around—they are to be commended for their swift action, especially Mayor Schaefer.”

While steps in the right direction have been taken, it may be a long while before Baltimore can boast of a top notch animal shelter. Two supervisory personnel have been assigned to receive professional training in the operation of a shelter. They will be attending classes at an extension of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Instructors include HSUS staffers Phyllis Wright and Phil Steward. A public education program directed to the elementary schools has just started. The program headed by an animal control officer, volunteer senior citizens and humane organization members will stress responsible pet ownership.

The City of Baltimore is utilizing HSUS literature in their public education program. They have also discussed the probability of constructing a new animal shelter and have requested continued HSUS assistance in this area. Steward continues to be in close contact with Baltimore’s progress and plans to make unannounced visits to the shelter. “Citizens for Animals is to be commended for bringing this problem to our attention. They applied what pressure they could. We were happy to effect their goals,” declared Steward.

One of the most significant changes has been the fulltime assignment of Dr. David Berzon, Public Health Veterinarian for the City of Baltimore, to the animal shelter. “He is finally where he should have been all along,” said Steward.

“Hopefully Dr. Berzon’s presence, plus the professionally trained supervisory staff who in turn will train other personnel, will prevent the past from ever occurring again.”

Baltimore is taking an additional step to ensure the enforcement of their animal control laws. They are seeking two new amendments to the city ordinance. One authorizes a door to door license canvass to increase the numbers of animals licensed and vaccinated against rabies. The other amendment before the City Council would authorize animal control officers to issue citations or summons to individuals violating animal control ordinances.

The HSUS does not approve of the use of high altitude decompression for euthanizing, the Society recognizes that, at the very least, such units should be properly maintained and efficiently operated according to manufacturer’s specifications, if they are used at all.

Cover: Our cover seeks to symbolize the animals for whose welfare we are responsible. As Dr. Loren Eisley, the 1976 Kruith medalist aptly said: “Nature is wonder more than in the guise of animals.” Illustrated by Ron Baker.