

Many people enjoy the companionship of cats and dogs, which were domesticated between 5,000 and 10,000 years ago. Over time, people have manipulated the animals' breeding to produce certain physical characteristics, resulting in the different types of cats and dogs we know today. But domestication took these animals out of the ecosystem, and their reproduction is no longer regulated naturally by predators or habitat. The result is an overpopulation crisis that necessitates widespread spaying and neutering.

#### The Tragic Cycle

Approximately 2,500 kittens and puppies are born each hour in the United States.(1) Some are bred intentionally by breeders who sell animals for a profit; some are allowed to breed by people who want their cat or dog to have the "experience" of having a litter or who want their children to witness the "miracle of life"; and some are the result of fertile animals being allowed to roam freely and mate.

Whatever the reason, the number of cats and dogs far exceeds the number of loving homes available. Unwanted animals are often treated as a nuisance; incidents of kitten drownings and dog abandonments are common. Many people drop off animals in rural areas thinking that someone will take them in or that they can fend for themselves. But the tragic results for the animals are cruel treatment, starvation, disease, freezing, highway death, procurement for research laboratories, and more unregulated breeding.

Even if someone can find homes for one litter of kittens or puppies, the overpopulation cycle continues if the animals are allowed to breed. And animals bred on purpose occupy homes that could have taken in homeless animals already born, destined to be destroyed.

Animal control agencies and shelters receive approximately 27 million animals annually. Those who are not adopted within about a week -- some 17 million of them -- are killed either by a painless lethal injection or by undesirable methods like carbon monoxide or decompression chambers.(2) In many areas where a practice called "pound seizure" is permitted, unclaimed animals can be given or sold to laboratories, where their deaths are often far from painless.

#### An Ounce of Prevention

Spaying and neutering helps stem the tide of overpopulation. It does not make animals fat and lazy, harm their health, or hurt their personalities, as some people mistakenly believe. Spaying not only reduces the stress and discomfort females endure during heat periods, but also eliminates the risk of uterine cancer and greatly reduces the chance of mammary cancer. Neutering makes males far less likely to roam or fight, and helps prevent testicular cancer.(3)

Female cats and dogs should be spayed soon after the age of six months. Males should be neutered between six and nine months of age, but both spaying and neutering can be done safely through most of adulthood. Some shelters are trying earlier spaying and neutering, which can be less stressful for animals.(4) The operations require only a few days' recuperation.

The Peninsula Humane Society, frustrated about having to euthanize 10,000 animals a year, got a county-wide ordinance passed in December 1990 requiring "that all dogs and cats over the age of nine months must be spayed or neutered unless their guardian has a breeding permit" or unless a veterinarian has determined that the surgery would endanger the animal's health.(5) Other jurisdictions are considering similar legislation. For a booklet explaining how to campaign for similar legislation in your area, send \$5 to The Fund for Animals, 808 Alamo Dr., Suite 306, Vacaville, CA 95688, or call 707-451-1306.

The one-time cost of spaying or neutering is less than the expense involved in raising puppies or kittens (food, shots, training, time) and is far less than the cost communities must pay toward animal control and euthanasia. Many cities have low-cost spay/neuter clinics to encourage owners to be responsible before they are faced with unwanted animals and before the animals themselves must pay for the excess with their lives.

#### References

- Friends of Animals, Inc., "The Vicious Cycle."
- Moulton, Carol, "Animal Shelters: Changing Roles," *The Animals' Agenda*, May 1988, pp. 14-15.
- Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, Alexandria, VA, "The Facts About Spaying and Neutering."
- Bartlett, Kim, "Early Neutering Begun by Some Shelters," *The Animals' Agenda*, May 1988, p. 21.
- Peninsula Humane Society, "Dear Friends" letter, Jan. 16, 1991.

Provided by:  
Henrico Humane Society  
PO Box 28014  
Richmond, VA 23228  
(804) 262-6634  
Web: [henricohumane.org](http://henricohumane.org)  
Email:  
[henricohumane@email.com](mailto:henricohumane@email.com)



People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals  
501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510; 757-622-PETA