



AMERICAN HUMANE

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Michigan HB 4263 & 4808 – Humane Euthanasia of Shelter Animals Myths and Facts

1. MYTH: Euthanizing shelter animals with carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide is safe for humans.

FACT: 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 humane way to euthanize shelter animals.
- Carbon monoxide poses a danger to humans because it is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and highly explosive¹. A gas chamber must be constantly checked and maintained to ensure no cracks in the structure or failing seals. When carbon dioxide is released in a confined area, it can cause asphyxiation, kidney damage, or induced coma.
- The gas chamber can jeopardize the safety of shelter workers. 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.²
- The American Veterinary Medical Association states: "*Carbon Monoxide is extremely hazardous for personnel because it is highly toxic and difficult to detect.*"³

2. MYTH: Euthanizing shelter animals with gas is humane for the animal.

FACT: EBI is the *most* humane method of euthanizing shelter animals.

- IF successful, the gas chamber can take up to 25 minutes to end an animal's life, whereas EBI causes loss of consciousness within 3 to 5 seconds and death within 5 minutes.⁴
- EBI is the method preferred by the National Animal Control Association,⁵ the American Veterinary Medical Association,⁶ the Association of Shelter Veterinarians,⁷ and The Humane Society of the United States.
- The American Veterinary Medical Association states that carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide is only suitable for small species.⁸ Furthermore, old, neonatal, and injured animals are often unable to absorb the gas as readily as healthier animals, which prolongs trauma and stress.⁹
- 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 2003¹⁰ and a puppy survived the Davie County, NC Animal Shelter's gas chamber in 2005.¹¹

¹ 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).

² "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).

³ American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia, p.10. (2007).

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

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

⁶ 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.

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

⁸ American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 30 (2007).

⁹ Grim, Randy, *Miracle Dog: How Quentin Survived the Gas Chamber to Speak for Animals on Death Row*, (Alpine Books, 2005, p. 27).

¹⁰ Id, p. 30.

¹¹ See Gunning, Mike, *Puppy Survives Euthanasia Attempt, Trip To Dump*, at <http://www.freewebs.com/animalshelternews/index.htm>.

- Referring to the horrors of carbon monoxide, Doug Fakkema, the nation's animal euthanasia expert,¹² 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.”¹³

3. MYTH: The gas chamber is the only practical and safe way of euthanizing aggressive and/or wild animals.

FACT: 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 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.¹⁴
- Proper training helps ensure that employees are capable of dealing with these types of animals, as they should be if involved in animal care and control.

4. MYTH: Shelter workers prefer to use the gas chambers.

FACT: 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.

5. MYTH: The gas chamber is cheaper than EBI. Switching to EBI will be costly for the state to implement.

FACT: A 2009 study by American Humane shows EBI is less costly 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 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.¹⁵ Cost figures from North Carolina are comparable to other states, including Michigan. Thus, EBI is more cost effective than gas. Moreover, it is unnecessary for the state to expend any dollars to help a shelter transition to EBI. Of the 10 gassing shelters remaining in Michigan, 5 already have EBI systems in place and the remaining shelters can transition to EBI through the help of their community, as well as state and national animal welfare organizations.

6. MYTH: It will be difficult for Michigan shelters to transition to EBI

FACT: The vast majority of Michigan shelters have already made the transition to EBI.

Only 7 Michigan animal shelters currently euthanize animals by carbon monoxide and 3 by carbon dioxide. Of these 10 shelters, 5 currently have an EBI back-up system, and 1 is undergoing training. Michigan has a law that permits shelter technicians to directly administer EBI drugs (commercially-available sodium pentobarbital) without supervision by a veterinarian,¹⁶ and a majority of shelters are licensed to receive EBI drugs. The Department of Community Health certifies shelters to obtain EBI drugs, and the forms to apply are readily available online. Access to the EBI drugs is also readily available. Fatal Plus, the brand with the overwhelmingly largest market share, is made in Dearborn, MI. American Humane is also available to help with the transition.

¹² 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.

¹³ Mott, Maryann. Animal Gas Chambers Draw Fire in U.S., National Geographic News, April 11, 2005.

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ January 2009; Doug Fakkema, Consultant to Animal Care & Control, Commissioned by American Humane Association. *Study available upon request*.

¹⁶ Public Act 368 of 1978, MCL 333.7333 (13).