

To those of you who let your pet reproduce (intentional or otherwise)...

We say: HOW DARE YOU!!

FACT: Every 1.5 seconds a shelter animal is killed. That's 192,308 per week or 27,473 pets killed every 24 hours, 365 days a year.

FACT: Over 10 million cats and dogs are killed in shelters each year. Millions more are abandoned, only to suffer from illness or injury before dying.

The only thing warm and fuzzy about pet overpopulation is the dogs, cats, puppies and kittens that die.

Responsible Pet Ownership

by Debra White

Millions of cats and dogs are destroyed every year in the United States merely for being unwanted. Despite the vigorous efforts by many humane societies and animal shelters to reduce pet overpopulation through spay and neuter programs, the problem persists.

While it is easy to get angry at the stray cats and dogs that forage through your trash at night for something to eat, the real culprits are the irresponsible pet owners who dump their unwanted pets rather than surrendering them to their local shelter. Even though "pet dumping" is illegal in Texas, many people continue to abandon their unwanted cats and dogs.

It is an absolute disgrace that we tolerate the destruction of so many healthy and adoptable animals whose only crime is being unwanted. I was once employed as a kennel attendant and part of my job entailed destroying homeless cats and dogs. It is heartbreaking to kill a purring cat or a tail wagging dog and to watch them die because of society's carelessness.

Some days the bodies piled up and this served as a grim reminder of public indifference to the tragedy of pet overpopulation.

Shelter workers often get blamed for destroying unwanted animals, yet many people are unwilling to take responsibility for a problem we did not create. Moreover, we do not enjoy taking lives but we are left with few viable alternatives.

This problem does have solutions and there are steps you can take to end this national tragedy.

1. Keep your dog confined to your property. If you walk your dog in a public place, use a leash. In most cities and towns, this is required by law anyway. This will prevent your dog from getting lost.

2. License your dog. The vast majority of communities require dog owners to license their pets every year. These funds help to keep desperately needed animal control officers on the job. Also, a dog with a current license can easily be returned to its owners should it become lost.

3. Put identification tags on your cats and dogs. Few, if any, lost cats that are brought to animal shelters have on proper I.D. tags. A dog or a cat with an identification tag can be quickly reunited with its owners. I.D. tags generally cost less than \$5.00 each. However, if you cannot afford an I.D. tag, you can simply write your phone number or address with a magic marker on your pet's collar.

4. Spay or neuter your pet. There simply are not enough homes for all of the dogs and cats that are surrendered to animal shelters every year. Sometimes even puppies and kittens do not get adopted and have to be destroyed. Don't add to the problem by allowing your pet to breed.

5. Make sure your pet is properly vaccinated. This is particularly important at this time because of the spread of rabies in our area.

6. If you have a dog, cat, or other domestic pet that you can no longer keep, do not abandon it. Unlike wild animals, dogs and cats cannot survive on their own. Once abandoned, they face starvation, sickness, and are frequently hit by cars. Unaltered pets will continue to reproduce. Unvaccinated animals spread disease. If you cannot find a new home for your pet, have the decency to surrender it to an animal shelter. While your dog or cat may not find a new home, at least it will not starve to death.

7. Utilize the services of your local animal control department if you see that an animal is being abused or if there are stray dogs in your area. These trained individuals are available to respond to animals in need. They are there to help.

8. Remember that a pet is a lifelong commitment.

9. Support your local animal shelter. There are many ways to support your local shelter even if you cannot afford to donate money. Animal shelters are almost always supported by private contributions and they can always use donated pet food, old towels, sheets, blankets, dog and cat toys, etc. Call your local shelter to find out what you can do to end pet overpopulation.

Debra White was employed as a kennel attendant at the Boulder Humane Society in Colorado, and was a kennel volunteer at the MSPCA in Boston