



American Humane Association

Humane Euthanasia of Shelter Animals Fact Sheet

1. Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) is the safest way for humans to euthanize shelter animals.

- Carbon monoxide poses a danger to humans because it is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and highly explosive. A gas chamber must be constantly checked and maintained to ensure that there are no cracks in the structure or failing seals. When carbon monoxide is released in a confined area, it can cause asphyxiation, kidney damage, or induced coma.
- The gas chamber jeopardizes the safety of shelter workers. In 2009, gas build-up caused the door of the Lincoln County, North Carolina shelter to explode open; the incident put an animal control officer in the emergency room. 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.
- The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) 2013 Guidelines on Euthanasia state: *"Leaky or faulty equipment may lead to slow, distressful death and may be hazardous to other animals and to personnel."* It also states, *"The advantages of using barbiturates for euthanasia in dogs and cats far outweigh the disadvantages. Intravenous injection of a barbituric acid derivative is the preferred method for euthanasia of dogs, cats, other small animals, and horses."*

2. EBI is the most humane method of euthanizing shelter animals.

- According to the AVMA Guidelines, *"In sick or depressed animals where ventilation is decreased, agitation during induction is more likely because the rise in alveolar gas concentration is delayed. A similar delayed rise in alveolar gas concentration can be observed in excited animals having increased cardiac output. Suitable premedication or noninhaled methods of euthanasia should be considered for such animals."* The guidelines proceed to state, *"Neonatal animals appear to be resistant to hypoxia, and because all inhaled agents ultimately cause hypoxia, neonatal animals take longer to die than adults. Inhaled agents can be used alone in unweaned animals to induce loss of consciousness, but prolonged exposure time or a secondary method may be required to kill the unconscious animal."*
- EBI is also the method preferred by the National Animal Control Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, and The Humane Society of the United States.

- 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 2003 and a puppy survived the Davie County, NC Animal Shelter's gas chamber in 2005.
- Already stressed and fearful "*Rapid gas flows can produce noise or cold drafts leading to animal fright and escape behaviors,*" according to the AVMA Guidelines.

3. 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/cages, and syringe poles. Shelter workers can then anesthetize the animal with an intramuscular injection of pre-euthanasia drugs, and then administer Sodium Pentobarbital once the animal is unconscious.

4. Many states have passed laws prohibiting carbon dioxide and monoxide euthanasia of shelter animals.

Currently, many states have laws that explicitly ban gassing for all types of animals in shelters. Some of the states which prohibit gassing in some way include but are not limited to: Arizona, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Virginia.

5. EBI provides shelter workers the dignity they deserve when facing the difficult reality of euthanizing pets.

American Humane Association 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.

6. A 2009 study by American Humane Association shows EBI is less costly than gas to communities.

American Humane Association commissioned a study on the costs associated between EBI and gas. Using data from an animal sheltering organization in North Carolina, the reported number of dogs and cats euthanized in 2007 was 5,427. The study, which is applicable to other jurisdictions, 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. Cost figures from North Carolina are comparable to other states. Thus, EBI is more cost effective than gas.

For more information, please contact:

American Humane Association

1-800-227-4645 or info@americanhumane.org