

## Ban Gas Chambers



*Objective: to eliminate gas chambers as a means of euthanizing animals in shelters.*

### Introduction

Since shelters began accepting companion animals, they have also been euthanizing them. When there is no more room, or animals are sick or injured beyond rehabilitation, shelter workers are faced with the daunting task of taking the animals' lives. One such method, used in many locales around the country, is the gas chamber. Thought to be an efficient method for mass euthanasia, it is also one of the more inhumane methods.

West Virginia passed legislation<sup>1</sup> outlawing the use of the gas chamber in animal shelters except where there was already a functioning chamber.

If a county had a working gas chamber before August 29, 2009, from a company that routinely manufactures and installs gas chambers, it is allowed to continue using it. However, the chamber has to be inspected and must comply with strict regulations that became effective June 16, 2011. Only a Certified Animal Euthanasia Technician (CAET) can operate the chamber.

The Federation of Humane Organizations of West Virginia (FOHO WV) opposes the use of gas chambers to euthanize animals in shelters.

### What is wrong with the gas chamber?

Far too many healthy cats and dogs, kittens and puppies die for

lack of homes. However, they should not have to die in fear, pain, and suffering—all of which can happen to them in a gas chamber. Some chambers hold as many as 20 animals. These animals are conscious when they are placed in the chamber. They are afraid and, therefore, may become aggressive toward the other animals in the chamber. **The animals may live for anywhere from 20 minutes to half an hour in these chambers before death takes them.** Some come out still breathing only to be put back in with another group of scared, whining, biting, scrabbling animals.

In addition, **gas chambers pose a risk to shelter employees** who are exposed to carbon monoxide when they load and unload or clean gas chambers. A 2007 American Veterinary Medical Association report warns, “[Carbon monoxide gas is]... hazardous to personnel because of the risk of explosions ... or health effects resulting from chronic exposure.... Leaky or faulty equipment may lead to slow, distressful death and be hazardous to other animals and to personnel.”<sup>2</sup> The report warns that electrical equipment, such as lights, fans, etc., in the vicinity of the gas chamber, is vulnerable to explosions. Additionally, shelters rarely use CO monitors or make nearby electrical equipment explosion proof. Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless and can easily go undetected before it reaches lethal limits.

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The Federation of Humane Organizations of West Virginia, INC. website promoting animal welfare throughout the state.

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### The humane way to euthanize animals

While the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) condones the use of the gas chamber for euthanasia of shelter animals, the *AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals*, does state, “euthanasia by intravenous injection of an approved euthanasia agent remains the preferred method for euthanasia of dogs, cats, and other small companion animals. Gas chambers are not recommended for routine euthanasia of cats and dogs in shelters and animal control operations.”<sup>3</sup>

**Euthanasia by injection does not pose a risk to shelter staff** even if the CAET administering the drug sticks him or herself with the needle. It would take a syringe much larger than the one used to euthanize even a large dog and it would have to be injected directly into a vein to have an effect on a human. It would be completely unlikely for that to occur so the danger to humans is extremely slight.

