

Commentary:

Methods of Animal Shelter Euthanasia

Increasingly, animal advocacy groups work to ban use of gas chambers in animal shelters. The concern should be facilities that are using improperly built/maintained chambers, or are using what they have in an inappropriate manner. It is not the CO itself that is at fault, it is the people that maintain and operate it.

A trained technician, using a properly designed and maintained chamber may in fact be performing more humane euthanasia than an individual with no training that is attempting to use an injectable drug.

Any method of euthanasia, improperly used or in inappropriate situations has the potential to be painful or 'cruel'.

CO is odorless, tasteless and actually the 'drug' of choice for many suicides. 99% pure CO, in a properly designed chamber results in unconsciousness in less than 10-12 seconds.

Where the problem arises is when dogs are 'packed' into the unit, put in with cats, put in with aggressive dogs, etc., it is not the CO that causes discomfort, it is the method in which it is used by the person using it.

Sodium Pentobarbital (primary drug for injectable EU) must (like any method) be properly administered. Direct heart sticks, if used, should be only used on animals that are pre-anesthetized; other animals may/should be pre-tranquilized if they are feral, fearful or injured, and even that may cause significant stressors in animals that only want to get as far from a human as they can manage.

Most activists think of cats and dogs as comparable to their beloved pets. These are NOT what make up the majority of animals euthanized. Most have little or no training or socialization, or are aggressive by nature, or are feral with no desire to be even close to, let alone handled by, any human. Certainly anti-gas chamber activists have NEVER volunteered to restrain a feral cat for euthanasia, an event which is neither pretty nor humane.

The emotional stress of having to be held, muzzled, etc, when the animal has never had a human hand on it is more stressful than simply walking into a unit that is clean, lighted, and having a door close; take 2-5 breaths and reach level III of unconsciousness, then death.

Puppies/kittens, animals with respiratory distress should be euthanized by injection; but by the same token, animals with depressed circulatory issues actually do better with CO (bleeding out from HBC or can't get a vein, not enough blood volume to carry it - and repeated sticks are not acceptable).

CO does NOT cause 'suffocation'; there is no sensation of 'gasping for their last dying breath' etc. Animals in a carbon monoxide chamber collapse, they FALL DOWN, they don't lie down. A conscious animal does not 'collapse'. Any paddling or vocalization which does occur happens ONLY after the animal is unconscious, as it does with sodium pentobarbital and other anesthetics. This is known as Stage III anesthesia, or euthanasia, and is also known as the Involuntary Excitement Stage.

CO is odorless and tasteless, which is why so many people actually die of CO inhalation in their own homes due to faulty heating systems or on camping trips using charcoal to 'heat' with. CO from a car engine pumped into an old icebox is not acceptable. Only 99% pure CO, in a properly designed and manufactured unit is.

CO binds with one molecule of oxygen in the hemoglobin, thereby reducing the oxygen supply to the brain; not reducing the oxygen supply to the lungs!

ANY death (getting hit by an 18 wheeler, overdose of drugs, falling off the Empire State Building) is ultimately caused by lack of oxygen to the brain. (no blood to the brain = no oxygen to the brain).

Injectable drug stops the brain, the brain controls the heart; the heart stops and then can't supply blood to the brain, then i.e., no oxygen to the brain. Basically the same process; just a different mode of delivery.

Have you ever witnessed a human coming out of a general anesthesia? – they may giggle, laugh, tell nasty jokes! or cuss like a sailor, they may kick, thrash (that's why they may have to be restrained); are they conscious? No. Are they in pain? No. It's an involuntary reaction of the electrical system in the brain. Some animals may react this way to CO or to injectable drug.

Is CO cruel? Absolutely not, IF it is properly administered. Is Sodium Pentobarbital cruel? Not if properly administered, on the proper subject, by a trained technician.

The problem is not the product, it is the technician.

The problem is lack of training. There are hands on courses available in NC but many counties/cities won't send their employees, won't update their equipment. Units made from old refrigerators, hooked to exhaust systems on gasoline generators (engines) are not acceptable.

There should be mandated training for both methods, and all shelters should have available both methods; nothing is a 'one size fits all'.

Actually, (again properly administered!!) gunshot is a perfectly acceptable method of euthanasia; but it is ultimately dangerous, and, unfortunately, because people 'don't like guns' it is thought of as 'ugly'.

Guns are not instruments of war, people are; guns don't kill people, people kill people. Guns are no more 'evil' than Sodium Pentobarbital, CO or an 18 wheeler, but a gun can be much more effective than any other method, in the proper setting and under the right circumstances.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) supports the proper use of CO, as well as gunshot and Sodium Pentobarbital. www.avma.org/resources/euthanasia

The very best State legislation on Euthanasia comes from South Carolina:
South Carolina General Statute: Section 47-3-420. Allowable methods of euthanasia.
[SC ST SEC 47-3-420]

SB529 / H 685 – Animal Shelter/Uniform Regulations was passed by the North Carolina General Assembly in the 2005 Session. The new law requires the Department of Agriculture to establish uniform standards for shelters, training for animal control employees, **and** standard euthanasia practice. NCDA is in the process of implementing this new law.

Should the choice of which type of euthanasia to use be the decision of the animal control officer and not legislated by state law?

It is patently false propaganda that carbon monoxide gas euthanasia is inhumane and that injection is painless. The determining factor is proper administration, not the method.

There is real danger to both of the animal control staff members required to restrain and inject, not the least of which is the possible exposure to a rabid animal. Euthanasia of possibly rabid animals and wildlife brings completely different needs for animal handling and staff safety; another point that anti-gas chamber activists fail to consider.

Euthanasia is in itself an unfortunate necessity. Those in animal control do not choose to have to euthanize beyond having chosen to work in that field. Irresponsible people choose to put them in the position that they have to euthanize. The methods of euthanasia, carbon monoxide, sodium pentobarbital, and gunshot in the field are all accepted by the scientific community as humane, and are humane when properly applied. There is no one of these methods which is more humane, especially in all situations.