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Columbus County Manager under attack by animal rights advocates

A movement to end use of gas chambers in North Carolina has taken the fight to Columbus County waging war against the County Manager, Jim Varner, and Animal Control Director Rossie Hayes.

Animal rights activists at the front of the battle present, at best, partial truths to make a case against the use of pure carbon monoxide for euthanasia and to stir up public emotion surrounding the issue.

NCRAOA supports Jim Varner's handling of this current situation, and applauds him for refusing the offer of assistance from PETA. North Carolinians are well aware of PETA's skill in euthanasia by injection; the animals killed by PETA workers in Ahoskie and tossed into dumpsters are testament to that fact.

Now circulating around the internet is an email purportedly written by Jim Willis. The emotionally based email contains quotes from other activists and in typical fashion selectively uses facts to suit the purpose of the writer, which is to whip the public into a frenzy of action against Jim Varner and Rossie Hayes.

We will address the misconceptions presented in that email and in other reports surrounding Columbus County animal control.

Email statement:

Euthanasia by injection (EBI) is the only accepted humane method of killing animals

FACT: As there is NO central organization that controls euthanasia policy in this country there is NO single approved method of euthanasia. See "Report from the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia". Many methods of euthanasia are acceptable because there are many species, and many situations. ONE method, i.e. injection, cannot and does not satisfy all variables.

Email statement:

Local media has reported that interim county manager Jim Varner and Animal Control director Rossie Hayes have stubbornly refused offers of help and have stated they will continue to use the gas chamber, including to kill puppies, kittens, sick, injured, and older animals.

FACT: Obeying current law is NOT stubbornly refusing. Before hysteria mounts let's have a dose of reality concerning euthanasia by gas.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) does NOT cause 'suffocation'. There is no sensation of 'gasping for their last dying breath'. That 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 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. Sick, injured and older animals most likely have compromised veins and/or circulatory systems, in which case it actually is kinder to euthanize by gas rather than repeated sticks searching for a vein that cannot be found.

Email statement:

Opponents say they (Jim Varner and Rossie Hayes and staff) are in violation of several North Carolina statutes and should be charged with animal cruelty. Should County Officials & Staff Be Charged With Animal Cruelty? Animal advocates say county officials and staff are in violation of N.C. Gen. Stat. 19A-1 et seq. (2003) ("Civil Remedy for Protection of Animals"), N.C. Gen. Stat. 130A-192 (2003) (requiring that dogs and cats be euthanized by approved procedures), N.C. Gen. Stat. 14-360 (2003) (making cruelty to animals a crime).

FACT: No one in Columbus County is in violation of current NC law. This is both an outright lie and dangerous attitude being exhibited by local animal rights zealots. The writer does not even cite the Statute sections accurately.

As part of the Uniform Animal Shelter regulations (SB SB529/H685) passed in the 2005 session and now incorporated into NC Statute 19A Article 3 Animal Welfare Act, the NC Department of Agriculture will be responsible for establishing methods of euthanasia to be used within the state. Wasting no time after bill passage, animal rights attorneys began sending letters to local animal control facilities. This prompted Mary Ann T. McBride, Program Development Veterinarian to send a letter to concerned AC managers (excerpt below):

November 23, 2005

To North Carolina's County and Municipal Animal Control/Shelter Managers and their Supervisors:

Many of you have received letters from local attorneys stating that you are currently not in compliance with the new law affecting your facility. Please note that the bill that was passed states that rules must be written prior to implementation of this law. To date, the new rules have not been written; therefore, no violations of compliance have occurred to date. I have attached copies of Session Law 2005-276, General Statute Chapter 19A Article 3 Animal Welfare Act, and North Carolina Administrative Code 02 NCAC Subchapter 52J Animal Welfare Section for your review.

In 2003, SB669 was introduced and passed. This animal rights advocate's dream modified the language of Chapter 19A and inserted "A real party in interest as plaintiff shall be held to include any person even though the person does not have a possessory or ownership right in an animal," meaning that any person whether or not they have any remote involvement in a case can file suit charging animal cruelty. NC is the ONLY state that has such a law. We cannot help but wonder what prompted our legislators to be ground-breakers, establishing this as law. As we can see by the threatening question "Should County Officials & Staff Be Charged With Animal Cruelty?" posed by the writer, animal activists intend to grasp at this to pursue their agendas. NCRAOA has been and continues to be adamantly opposed to this addition to the NC Statute, and to any suggestion of misuse of the statute by attempting to bring charges against Columbus County personnel.

Email statement:

Myths: Use of the gas chamber is an accepted method of euthanasia. The National Animal Control Association condemns the use of any type of gas chamber: <http://www.nacenet.org/poleuth.htm>

FACT: This page actually does not condemn ALL gas euthanasia, only Carbon Dioxide; it states: "NACA considers lethal injection of sodium pentobarbital, administered by competent, trained personnel, to be the method of choice utilized for humane euthanasia of animal shelter dogs and cats. NACA acknowledges that there are agencies legally restricted in their ability to obtain Sodium Pentobarbital. In such cases the alternative must be carbon monoxide bottled specifically for the use in euthanasia. The alternative must never be used as the primary technique if the use of Sodium Pentobarbital can be arranged for in some manner and must never be used for old, sick/injured or pregnant animals and those under 4 months of age. Under these circumstances, assistance must be sought from veterinarians to provide euthanasia services utilizing sodium pentobarbital."

Email statement.

The American Veterinary Medical Association only supports euthanasia of unwanted animals by trained personnel using accepted humane methods: <http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animalwelfare/euthanasia.asp>

FACT: In the context used by the writer, this statement misleads the reader to draw a conclusion that Columbus County animal control is doing something wrong. The link reads: "Euthanasia of Unwanted Animals. The AVMA is not opposed to the euthanasia of unwanted animals, when appropriate, by properly trained personnel, using acceptable humane methods." [emphasis added]

As we stated above, "Report from the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia" lists Carbon Monoxide (CO) as an acceptable method and AVMA does not support abandoning or outlawing the use of gas chambers.

Email statement:

The American Humane Association has adopted EBI as the only acceptable method of euthanasia and does not approve of the use of gas in animal shelters. Their euthanasia expert with over 30 years experience has written a definitive position paper on that subject, Comparison of Sodium Pentobarbital and Carbon Monoxide as Euthanasia Agents, in which he states: "Numerous cost studies prove that the cost difference is negligible. When done properly, both CO and EBI are nearly equal in cost per animal. <http://www.crean.com/kindness/ebi-vs-co.html>

FACT: While the cost per animal may be the same, EBI is very labor intensive and usually requires two persons, necessitating the hiring of additional personnel. Additionally record keeping can be difficult, and ability to obtain and use a federally regulated drug can be an obstacle for some animal control facilities.

Email statement:

No matter where you live PLEASE take some minutes out of your busy schedules and join this effort to end the cruel murder of animals in Columbus County, North Carolina.

FACT: Euthanasia of unwanted animals is in itself a tragedy. There are as many stories as there are animals surrendered. Through no fault of their own, animals are surrendered due to bad behavior, family moving, family getting divorced, babies being born, health problems, housebreaking issues, wrong size, wrong color, too noisy, doesn't like other pets, and the list goes on. It is a people problem, not an animal problem and the animal shelter is the recipient. For the writer to incite the public with the term "murder" is beyond reason; it is an animal rightist term and the sole purpose is to further an agenda within our state.

NCRAOA Board of Directors

May 16, 2006

For more information on euthanasia facts, animal shelter populations, and North Carolina regulations, visit the North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance website:

www.ncraoa.com