

Humane euthanasia. Why is it necessary?

As ***The Shelter Patchwork*** article testifies, euthanasia in South Carolina is a widespread practice. That being said, no one likes euthanasia, even if humanely administered—especially those who must carry it out.

The Columbia Animal Shelter, like many public shelters across America, is the shelter of last resort for pets who cannot be privately placed in homes. The Columbia shelter serves all of Richland County through a cooperative arrangement with Richland County and its animal control services.

Being a public shelter, the city shelter cannot and will not refuse any dog or cat brought in by an owner or animal control professional. In the Midlands and across America, there are 9 times more animals needing new homes than homes willing to accept them. In 2004, the Columbia shelter accepted over 12,000 lost, homeless or unwanted animals.

The Columbia shelter and the Animal Mission work hard to maximize adoptions, but sick, injured and dangerous animals face dim futures given the supply of healthy animals available for adoption. Feral pets have behavior problems that make adoptions difficult. Older, healthy animals are also difficult to place in private homes given public preferences for young, healthy pets. Older animals pose a particular strain on shelters that do not practice euthanasia by taking up valuable space for longer periods of time than younger, more adoptable animals.

Leaving animals to fend for themselves is not an answer. Feral animals live harsh, brief lives. Many pose health risks to people. And feral cats take a terrible toll of native wildlife—birds and small mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

It is important that we appropriately characterize euthanasia. Demonizing the practice is easy. We need shelters that practice humane euthanasia given the huge overpopulation of pets in our society. It is vital that we continue to stress humane education (people being the ultimate source of most animal problems), spay/neutering for ALL pets, and aggressive adoption programs.

Those abreast of the problems recognize euthanasia as a short-term solution. Ultimately, only humane education will teach people the importance of spaying/neutering their pets. The negligence of humankind in this area is all too apparent. But this work requires resources. All humane organizations need more resources to address the flow of animals into the system. Less is not more in humane care.

So support the Animal Mission by becoming a member! And if not us, support some other humane organization. If you care about animals, put your money to work to better their lives.

- *The Board of the Animal Mission, 2001*