

PUPPY MILLS

What is a Puppy Mill?

A puppy mill is a large scale breeding operation in which puppies are mass-produced for profit in substandard conditions. The goal of a puppy mill is to produce as many puppies as possible with minimal cost to, and maximal financial gain for, the operator. A puppy mill cannot and will not meet the needs of a dog and is most definitely a blatant form of cruelty.

A Widespread Problem

Puppy milling is a multimillion dollar business in Canada. At least 90 percent of pet store puppies come from puppy mills. However, pet stores are not the only place where puppy mill pups are sold. They are sold through the Internet, at flea markets, advertised in local newspapers, and sometimes sold directly from the mill, although visitors are not usually allowed inside the facility to see the conditions in which the dogs are kept.

Puppy mill operators will often sell through puppy brokers who distribute the puppies to the pet shops. The puppies are usually four to eight weeks of age, when they are removed from their mothers and shipped great distances (for as long as a week at a time) to pet stores throughout Canada and the US in overcrowded, dark and dirty trucks, crammed in crates with other puppies and without quality food or water. The puppies are so young because they are cute at this age and easier to sell, but they are also very susceptible to disease and have not received enough (if any) vaccinations. Given the poor hygiene conditions and lack of medical attention, animals from puppy mills are often infested with internal parasites or contagious diseases.

Characteristics of a Puppy Mill:

INSUFFICIENT HOUSING - The breeding dogs are often kept in cages with wire bottoms, which can cause permanent damage to their feet. Many times, they are kept outside with only thin plywood as protection against the severe Canadian elements. Others are kept in tin sheds with inadequate lighting, ventilation or heat.

OVERCROWDING – The dogs are almost always kept in small, cramped cages where they may not even be able to turn around or stand fully. Some dogs have even been found in dark closets or crates which have been permanently nailed shut.

LACK OF SANITATION – Cages are often stacked on top of each other, allowing excrement and urine to flow down on top of the dogs and puppies below and there is little or no cleanup. The build of smells (ammonia) can be overpowering.

UNDERFEEDING - Malnutrition is common. In many cases, the dogs are fed the minimum needed to keep them alive and producing. The food they are given is the

generally the cheapest poorest quality that can be bought, often not meeting their nutritional requirements. As a result, malnutrition related diseases are common.

LACK OF VETERINARY CARE - There is minimal or non-existent first aid. Many dogs are not vaccinated properly or wormed to rid them of internal parasites, making contagion common in these crowded facilities. There is almost never any -pre or -post breeding vet inspection or care.

CRUELTY - The majority of the breeding females spend their entire lives in small, filthy cages without exercise, love or human contact. They are almost always bred at their first heat cycle of six to twelve months and bred continually every heat cycle until their tired, worn bodies finally give out and they can no longer produce enough puppies. This usually occurs at four to six years of age. At this point, they are no longer profitable and are simply killed or left to die, as are unsold male dogs.

SHADY BREEDING PRACTICES - No genetic tests are conducted on the vast majority of breeding dogs, which greatly increases the chance of the puppy developing a genetic disorder. Breeders also allow over-breeding and inbreeding to occur. Most puppies have, or will develop, genetic defects and/or other health problems sometime in their life as a result of poor breeding practices and unsanitary conditions at the puppy mill. They often have behavioural and temperament problems as well, resulting from a complete lack of socialization with humans or other dogs.

FRAUD - The dogs' ears may be tattooed with fake purebred registration. Often, fake veterinarian certificates of inoculation and fake Canadian Kennel Club registration papers are provided.

Quebec – A “haven” for inhumane breeders?

Until recently, Quebec was the only province that didn't have an animal welfare act. And unlike other Canadian provinces or most American states, Quebec had minimal provincial legislation covering commercial dog breeding operations, making it a haven for inhumane breeders. The result has been the creation of up to 2200 unregulated puppy mills in Quebec, that breed up to 400 000 dogs per year. Half the dogs bred in Quebec are sold outside the province to pet stores and wholesalers across Canada and (until recently) the US.

In January 2005, the province of Quebec finally adopted an animal welfare law, Bill P-42. This new legislation grants the right of inspection - the ability to investigate a breeding operation without a warrant, provides for fines of up to \$15,000 and allows courts to bar the guilty from owning pets for only up to two years. Anima-Quebec, a non-profit animal welfare group in Quebec City, was given the mandate to enforce this new law.

While this law is definitely a step in the right direction, it is far from ideal. A breeder convicted (and this is hard to do) of keeping animals in inhumane conditions may only

be prohibited from keeping animals, or even just limited in the number of animals he or she may keep, for a maximum of two years, rather than the ideal lifetime ban. The fines only become noteworthy when a breeder is subsequently caught ignoring a court order after being warned, at which time he or she can be fined \$1 600 - \$5 000; if caught ignoring an order a second time, is fined up to \$3 200 - \$15 000; subsequent offences, fines may be as high as \$45 000.

Furthermore, Anima Quebec has fewer than seven inspectors and government funding of only \$150 000, making it hard to inspect the 1500-2200 puppy mills currently found in Quebec, especially considering Ontario's team of 300 inspectors (working with a \$40 million annual budget) finds it difficult to keep up with Ontario's puppy mills. It's clear that Anima Quebec has its work cut out for it. Thus, there is still much room for improvement and much work to be done. It won't be easy since provincial dog breeding regulations are not a priority for the Quebec government, who has stated in the past that while it is a very noble cause, they don't have the money and must make priorities and have made their choice.

What You Can Do

(1) Sign our pledge declaring your support for a national ban on puppy mills and stronger laws for animal protection.

(2) Write to politicians and propose a ban on the sale of puppies in pet stores. Puppy mills thrive one puppy at a time. Eliminating the network that feeds the industry (from breeders to pet stores) will help stop puppy mills.

(3) In the meantime, don't buy from pet shops. As long as people keep buying their puppies, these unhumane breeders will continue to flourish.

(4) Instead, adopt a dog from your local humane society, shelter or rescue club. Thousands of good dogs – purebreds, crossbreds and mutts of all ages, sizes and personalities – are abandoned each year simply because their previous guardians were unprepared or uninformed about how to care for them. Rescue organizations are careful to pair you with the right dog for your family and lifestyle.

(5) NEVER adopt a puppy on impulse. Adopting a dog into your family is a decision that will affect the life of everyone in the house for the next ten to fifteen years. Think about it carefully and take the time to do your research. Find out about the needs of the dog breed you're interested in, and make sure you can meet those needs.

(6) Spaying and neutering your own dogs is also very important.

(7) If you suspect a puppy mill operation contact local authorities, such as a humane society.

(8) Spread the message and educate others about these horrible operations. Urge people to adopt puppies from shelters rather than from pet stores, etc. Write letters to the editor about puppy mills and pet stores explaining the mills' inhumane treatment of puppies and their contribution to pet overpopulation.