



Michigan Humane Euthanasia of Shelter Animals Fact Sheet

1. All Michigan shelters except 8 have made the transition to euthanasia by injection (EBI), and the transition process is not difficult.

Only 6 Michigan animal shelters currently euthanize animals by carbon monoxide and 2 by carbon dioxide.¹ Six of those shelters have an EBI back-up system and/or are trained in EBI procedures. Michigan law permits shelter technicians to directly administer EBI drugs (commercially-available sodium pentobarbital) without supervision by a veterinarian,² and a majority of shelters are licensed to receive EBI drugs. The Department of Community Health certifies shelters to obtain EBI drugs, and the forms to apply are readily available online. Access to the EBI drugs is also readily available. Fatal Plus, the brand with the overwhelmingly largest market share, is made at Vortech Pharmaceuticals, Inc. in Dearborn, MI. The Humane Society of the United States and American Humane Association (through a grant dedicated to Michigan shelters) are also available to help with the transition for shelters.

2. Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) is the safest way for humans to euthanize shelter animals.

- EBI is the method preferred by the National Animal Control Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, American Humane Association, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and The Humane Society of the United States.
- Carbon monoxide poses a danger to humans because it is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and highly explosive³. A gas chamber must be constantly checked and maintained to ensure no cracks in the structure or failing seals. When carbon monoxide is released in a confined area, it can cause asphyxiation, kidney damage, or induced coma.
- The gas chamber can jeopardize the safety of shelter workers. In 2008, an explosion in the Iredell County, North Carolina Animal Services' gas chamber revealed that, contrary to recommendations, the equipment in the vicinity of the chamber was not explosion proof. A shelter worker was in the room at the time and other personnel were nearby. In 2000, a shelter worker in Tennessee was asphyxiated to death while operating a faulty gas chamber. And in 1997 a shelter veterinarian in Illinois was severely injured while operating a gas chamber. In contrast, there are no documented reports of any shelter worker being killed from an accidental injection of sodium pentobarbital.⁴
- The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) 2007 Guidelines on Euthanasia state: "*Carbon Monoxide is extremely hazardous for personnel because it is highly toxic and difficult to detect . . . The advantages of using barbiturates for euthanasia in small animals far outweigh the disadvantages. Intravenous injection of a barbituric acid derivative is the preferred method for euthanasia of dogs, cats, other small animals, and horses.*"⁵

¹ **Carbon Monoxide:** Berrien County Animal Control; Branch County Animal Control; Cass County Animal Control; St. Joseph County Pound and Animal Control; Huron Township Animal Shelter; and Van Buren County Animal Control, **Carbon Dioxide:** Gratiot County Animal Control and Mecosta County Animal Services.

² Public Act 368 of 1978, MCL 333.7333 (13).

³ See Christopher Henry, et al., *Myocardial Injury and Long-term Mortality Following Moderate to Severe Carbon Monoxide Poisoning*, (The Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 295, No. 4, 2006).

⁴ "Sodium pentobarbital is not considered a health hazard to staff unless it is deliberately misused or handled incorrectly." (American Humane Association, *Operational Guide for Animal Care and Control Agencies: Euthanasia by Injection*, p. 19, 2005).

3. EBI is the *most humane and painless method of euthanizing shelter animals*.

- IF successful, the gas chamber can take up to 25 minutes to end an animal's life, whereas EBI causes loss of consciousness within 3 to 5 seconds and death within 5 minutes.⁶ EBI causes animals to lose consciousness and brain function before their vital organs shut down. In a gas chamber, however, animals lose consciousness and brain function only after their vital organs shut down, causing prolonged suffering and distress.
- The American Veterinary Medical Association states that carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide is only suitable for *most* small species.⁷ However, old, neonatal, and injured animals are often biologically unable to absorb the gas as readily as larger or healthier animals, which prolongs trauma and stress.⁸
- Birds and neonatal animals are commonly euthanized by using halothane or isoflurane anesthesia gas, followed by an intraperitoneal injection into the abdominal cavity. Birds are commonly euthanized via an oral injection of sodium pentobarbital. Using dioxide on these animals is unnecessary.
- The animals don't always die in gas chambers, as documented by the fact that a dog survived the St. Louis, MO Animal Regulation Center's gas chamber in 2003 and a puppy survived the Davie County, NC Animal Shelter's gas chamber in 2005.⁹
- Referring to the horrors of carbon monoxide, Doug Fakkema, the nation's animal euthanasia expert,¹⁰ has stated: "[t]he animal is in a warm or hot box, usually with other animals. They don't know what is going on. They get dizzy, and then they panic. Fights can break out, and animals' calls can sometimes be heard."¹¹

4. It is dangerous to put aggressive and/or wild animals in the gas chamber.

It is much safer for shelter workers to sedate and then inject an aggressive animal instead of dragging it frantically into a gas chamber thus causing more trauma and pain. Many common restraint methods do not require shelter workers to handle the animal themselves if the animal is deemed dangerous. These include: Restraint poles, squeeze gates, and syringe poles. Shelter workers can then anesthetize the animal with an intramuscular injection of pre-euthanasia drugs, followed by Sodium Pentobarbital once the animal is unconscious. If these restraint methods are not available, shelter workers can give aggressive animals Sodium Pentobarbital by mouth by mixing its powder form (called Fatal Plus) with canned food or by squirting it into the animal's mouth. Once the animal is unconscious, they can administer a lethal dose of the drug.¹²

5. This bill does not regulate veterinary services.

Of the 8 shelters¹³ that currently euthanize by gas in Michigan, none of those shelters have a veterinarian performing euthanasia on-site at the shelter. This bill simply regulates shelter services in relation to euthanasia and does not impact veterinarians.

⁶ American Humane Association, *Euthanasia by Injection—Training Guide*, p. 8 (2008).

⁷ American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia, p. 30 (2007). AVMA Guidelines also "recommend that inhalant agents not be used alone in animals less than 16 weeks old except to induce loss of consciousness, followed by the use of some other method to kill the animal." (p. 10).

⁸ Grim, Randy, *Miracle Dog: How Quentin Survived the Gas Chamber to Speak for Animals on Death Row*, (Alpine Books, 2005, p. 27).

⁹ See Gunning, Mike, *Puppy Survives Euthanasia Attempt, Trip To Dump*, at <http://www.freewebs.com/animalshelternews/index.htm>.

¹⁰ Doug Fakkema is a trainer and consultant for American Humane with over 35 years' experience in animal protection. He conducts euthanasia workshops around the country. See Doug Fakkema, *Comparison of Sodium Pentobarbital and Carbon Monoxide as Euthanasia Agents*. www.crean.com/kindness/ebi-vs-co.html.

¹¹ Mott, Maryann. Animal Gas Chambers Draw Fire in U.S., National Geographic News, April 11, 2005.

¹² Mr. Fakkema states: "I can euthanize a dangerous dog in his/her kennel by feeding sodium pentobarbital—no handling necessary." See <http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/06/10/carbondioxschambers106.html>.

¹³ Berrien County Animal Control (carbon monoxide – trained in EBI); Branch County Animal Control (carbon monoxide – has an EBI backup); Cass County Animal Control (carbon monoxide – has an EBI backup); Gratiot County Animal Control (carbon dioxide – trained in EBI); Mecosta County Animal Services (carbon dioxide); St. Joseph County Pound and Animal Control (carbon monoxide – trained in EBI); Huron Township Animal Shelter (carbon monoxide); and Van Buren County Animal Control (carbon monoxide – trained in EBI).

6. Many states have passed laws prohibiting carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide euthanasia of shelter animals.

Nine states have laws that explicitly ban all forms of gassing for all types of animals in shelters (including ferals and wildlife): Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wyoming. These additional states have prohibited carbon dioxide and monoxide for shelter cats and dogs: Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Virginia.

7. The Headlee Amendment is not implicated by this bill.

Article 9, Section 29 of the Headlee Amendment states that “A new activity or service or an increase in the level of any activity or service **beyond that required by existing law** shall not be required by the legislature or any state agency of units of Local Government, unless a state appropriation is made and disbursed to pay the unit of Local Government for any necessary increased costs.” Animal shelters, and their activities, are discretionary services under Michigan law (MCL 287.289a). According to Headlee experts, a new law setting forth permitted euthanasia techniques does not mandate a “new service” requiring funding.

8. EBI provides shelter workers the dignity they deserve when facing the difficult reality of euthanizing pets.

Most shelter workers wish to hold and comfort a frightened animal in its final moments of life. That act may be the only kindness the animal has ever known. In contrast, the gas chamber is both inhumane and demoralizing to the emotional and physical health of human beings and animals.

9. A 2009 study by American Humane shows EBI is less costly than gas to communities.

American Humane commissioned a study in 2009ⁿ on the costs associated between EBI and gas. Using data from an animal sheltering organization in North Carolina, the number of dogs and cats euthanized in 2007 was 5,427. The study shows that the cost to use carbon monoxide gas is \$4.98 per animal. The cost to use carbon monoxide poisoning without a tranquilizer is \$4.66 per animal. The cost to use EBI, however, was only \$2.29 per animal.¹⁴ Cost figures from North Carolina are comparable to other states, including Michigan. Thus, EBI is more cost effective than gas. Moreover, it is unnecessary for the state to expend any dollars to help a shelter transition to EBI. Of the 8 gassing shelters remaining in Michigan, 6 already have EBI systems in place and the remaining shelters can transition to EBI through the help of their community, as well as state and national animal welfare organizations. American Humane has a grant dedicated to Michigan shelters to help gassing shelters purchase EBI supplies and receive EBI training so that the transition is not costly to the local community.

10. Sodium Pentobarbital-euthanized carcasses do not present a significant threat to scavenger animals.

Sodium pentobarbital-euthanized carcasses are placed in landfills across the nation and the incidents of death among scavenger animals are rare. According to national euthanasia expert Doug Fakkema: “In order to be killed from exposure to sodium pentobarbital, a scavenger would need to absorb a lethal amount of a euthanized carcass. Because sodium pentobarbital is not a poison but an *anesthetic*, a scavenger would need to absorb a significant amount of a large and edible carcass in order to be killed, versus possibly temporarily lethargic, from exposure. In Michigan, animal carcasses are not to be buried without consent from the local authorities and standards by which animal carcasses can be disposed are high.

For more information:
Michiganders for Shelter Pets
www.voiceless-mi.org/m4sp/

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