



CAT EUTHANASIA IN MICHIGAN

Are You Aware of the Numbers?

According to statistics compiled by Michigan Department of Agriculture, in 2009 over 200,000 dogs and cats were admitted to shelters across the state of Michigan. Approximately 100,000 of these animals were euthanized with 70,000 of those euthanasias being performed on cats. As Dr. Kate Hurley from UC Davis Koret Center stated at the Midwest Veterinary Conference, the greatest predictive indicator for death for a cat is to enter a shelter. If we were dealing with a disease where 65–70 percent of the cats affected died, we would consider our medical algorithm to be gravely inadequate. Certainly for cats the shelter becomes, in many instances, a terminal prognosis.

Given these statistics, it becomes more important than ever to look at solutions other than admission into a shelter for our cat population. It is interesting to note that the number of cats entering shelters in urban areas in 2009 is higher than in rural areas. The Detroit metropolitan area shows that the Michigan Humane Society reported an intake of 17,000. Smaller urban areas such as Jackson saw intakes of approximately 3,400 cats. When reviewing this information for rural counties such as Van Buren County in southwestern Michigan, only 90 cats were admitted into the shelter.

This may reflect a demographic difference in the perceptions of cats. It may be that in rural or primarily agricultural areas, cats are viewed as free-roaming or even as wildlife. There may be a greater sense that cats are self-sufficient and able to survive climate changes just as wildlife does. Cats may also be perceived as beneficial for rodent control and less of a nuisance. In small cities or true urban areas, there may be a perception that the large numbers of cats present problematic territorial behavior and destruction to property. In addition, there may be more of a concern about surviving extreme weather change. All of these facts may lead populations in urban areas to consider a free-roaming cat as not having an adequate quality of life.

Over the last several years, numerous facts have come to light regarding the cat population in the United States:

- Cats are prolific breeders. One model presented at a Pet Point summit showed that 80 percent of kittens were produced by females that had been sterilized. This statement seems counterintuitive. In reality, most cats that are sterilized are allowed to have one or more litters before OHE. It was stated that this number would dramatically decrease if the veterinary

profession would recommend feline OHE at 4 months rather than 6 months of age.

- Trapping and euthanasia of cats has had no positive impact on the cat overpopulation issue.
- Trap, neuter and release programs such as implemented by Dr. Julie Levy from the University of Florida and subsequently initiated in various communities such as Jacksonville, Florida, seem to be effective.
- The language regarding these cats has changed. Initially it was trap, neuter, and release of feral cats. Now the definition has broadened to community cats or free-roaming cats. This includes cats that can be touched by humans and interact with humans, but are not owned.
- The first prospective study has been initiated by the ASPCA in Queens, New York (*Veterinary News*, May 2011). The goal of this study is to compare the effects of a spay/neuter program on the number of abandoned animals in New York City. This study includes free-roaming cats.

In Michigan, there are numerous organizations that are pursuing spay/neuter of community (feral and free-roaming) cats. The most notable has been Oakland County Adoption Center which received a \$100,000 grant from PetSmart Charities, beginning in April of 2011 for 48 months. The grant will provide sterilization for cats in Southfield with a goal of sterilizing 1,000 cats per year (including any feral cat in a live trap). The fee to the person bringing the cat for the procedure is \$10 and includes a rabies vaccine. The sterilization procedures will be performed at the Oakland County Adoption Center and at All About Animals Rescue in Madison Heights. All About Animals Rescue is an organization that completes approximately 8,000 OHE and OEs a year. It is modeled after the Humane Alliance Program out of Ashville, North Carolina. This program

has been well-organized and embraced by city officials and the Southfield community.

There are many smaller programs that are also participating in OHE and OE procedures for cats across the state. Examples include Adopt-a-Pet in Fenton, Cascades Humane Society in Jackson, C-Snip in the Grand Rapids area, and the Humane Society of Huron Valley in Ann Arbor. The latter is a unique situation because one of their directives was to reduce the number of “feral” cats. This caused their open-admission county-based operations to reclassify these cats as wildlife. Since that reclassification, HSHV has seen a dramatic reduction in the numbers of cats turned into their shelter. The positive consequence of this change has been a dramatic reduction in the numbers of cat euthanasias.

Initially it seems like a stretch to classify cats as wildlife, but when one recognizes that the vast majority of feral cats deposited at shelters appear clinically healthy and well fed, it is obvious that they are self-sufficient. As Debbie Shutt, chairman of Michigan Pet Fund Alliance stated, “You don’t drive down the street picking up squirrels and taking them to the shelter. Why do you do this to feral cats?”

So what is the purpose of this article?

- To inform MVMA members of the numbers of cats that are admitted to shelters and the numbers that are subsequently euthanized.
- To inform the MVMA that PetSmart Charities has given a very substantial grant to a group in Oakland County to spay and neuter cats in Southfield. Southfield was chosen because there was great support within the community for this program.
- To inform MVMA members of programs such as Spay Michigan so that we can provide that information to clients who may know of community cats but do not have the financial ability to have sterilizations performed at our facilities.

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MVMA AND INVISIBLE FENCE® BRAND CONTINUE COLLABORATION

Pet Oxygen Mask Donation Program

The Michigan Veterinary Medical Association members and Invisible Fence® Brand (IFB) dealers teamed up in late 2009 to ensure fire departments and first responders throughout the state are equipped with specially designed oxygen mask kits in an effort to save more pets from succumbing to fire/smoke inhalation.

Although the number of pets that die in fires is not an official statistic kept by the U.S. Fire Administration, industry web sites and sources have cited an estimated 40,000 to 150,000 pets each year that die in fires—most succumbing to smoke inhalation.

As part of the collaborative effort between Invisible Fence® Brand and member veterinarians, the oxygen mask kits are jointly presented to local fire departments throughout Michigan. Invisible Fence® Brand covers the cost of the kits and asks that members make a donation to the Michigan Animal Health Foundation in order to further build funds to support research that will benefit the health and well being of animals. The value of the specially designed oxygen mask kit is \$60 which includes a small, medium, and large mask, tubing, cleaning, and operational instructions, as well as a protective bag.

Members interested in participating in the program should contact MVMA at mvmam@michvma.org or (517) 347-4710. For a small donation to the foundation, you’ll received a huge amount of great PR for your practice!

