



The Disturbing Facts About PeTA

The nation's largest animal rights group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals ("PeTA") is notorious for fighting to protect animals from harm. But they also have a policy that is in direct contradiction to everything else they espouse to stand for. PeTA has called for the killing of Pit Bulls in shelters, opposes Trap-Neuter-Return for feral cats, and advocates a policy against No Kill shelters. In fact, PETA itself routinely kills healthy dogs and cats. In 2005, PeTA staff members were charged with breaking the law after killing dogs and cats they promised to find homes for and then throwing their bodies into a dumpster. Almost immediately, PeTA tried to quell the public relations backlash by publishing an article in the Fall 2005 issue of "Animal Times," their magazine. In the article, PeTA claims No Kill is a sham and that killing homeless animals is an act of compassion. We asked Jeff Lydon, the Executive Director of the Tompkins County SPCA his view on the PeTA article. Since 2002, the Tompkins County SPCA, an animal control agency in Ithaca, New York, has made Tompkins County a No Kill community. This is what he had to say.

In PeTA's Fall 2005 issue of Animal Times, the special report titled the "Disturbing Facts About No-Kill Shelters" omitted one crucial factor: The Tompkins County SPCA.

The Tompkins County SPCA is an open admission, No Kill animal control agency that alters every animal adopted, as well as thousands of public animals on a sliding scale basis at little or no cost to pet owners. It's also noteworthy that the Tompkins County SPCA has a monopoly on animal care and control services in the county. The shelter provides all impoundment and animal sheltering services in Tompkins County, and so ensures that the entire community is No Kill. We never pass the buck.

Granted, this shelter is unique, perhaps the only one of its kind. That is no reason to dismiss our accomplishment; rather, it poses a challenge to broaden the scope of the discussion. The precedent we have set proves that we can take in every animal without killing any healthy or treatable animals, and still devote enough resources to prevention in order to spay and neuter every animal possible.

We define healthy and treatable by the most ethically rigorous standard, such that only about one in 20 animals that enter the shelter is killed. At this shelter, euthanasia is not a euphemism for killing. We practice euthanasia only when it is the most humane course, reserving it for those rare instances when an animal is either

medically beyond hope or simply too dangerous. PeTA bastardizes the term euthanasia to downplay the gravity of killing and make the task easier, as if killing healthy or treatable animals were an act of mercy. Calling such killing “euthanasia” is like calling slavery “alternative labor.”

Throughout their typically brief stays at the shelter, our animal guests enjoy as high a quality of life as is possible short of being in a good home. We ensure that they have daily exercise and socialization, designer pet food, and an extraordinary level of veterinary care. In addition, when not in our shelter, the animals are placed in the care of foster families - who are well trained, well monitored, and conscientious caregivers.

In short, our example debunks PeTA’s claims. PeTA has an obligation to acknowledge that, and to grant air to the possibility it holds forth for all shelters. Otherwise, PeTA risks

becoming like our mutual adversaries, in so far as their argument implies an ethically dubious case - namely, that the potential suffering of a larger group of unborn animals entitles that group to rights to which a smaller group of living animals is not entitled. We don’t have to compromise. We don’t have to kill today in order to save tomorrow. Isn’t that worth mentioning in an article critical of No Kill shelters?

Instead, the article sources only those in agreement with its premise. PeTA’s article quotes Sharon Adams liberally: “There’s not a ‘no-kill’ shelter in this country that does not turn animals away every single day.” That is patently false, because of us. And our experience at the Tompkins

County SPCA turns the core of PeTA’s case inside-out.

We don’t cause a burden to other shelters. On the contrary, residents of neighboring counties (which are beyond our mandate) routinely dump their unwanted animals on our doorstep rather than surrendering them to their own county’s shelters where those animals are more likely to find life brutish, nasty, and short.

We’ll find them good homes - no matter their age or disability, no matter the cost. But our job is not made easier when the nation’s leading animal rights organization misguides the public with a thin-minded portrayal of the No Kill movement that neglects to mention the movement’s ideal model as fully realized by this shelter.

It has long been a simple yet compelling argument for activists to ask - *how can you justify treating a pig this way when you would never treat a dog this way?* PeTA’s article, in glossing over so much and ignoring the Tompkins County SPCA, threatens to turn that argument on its head - *you shouldn’t kill pigs but it’s important to kill dogs.* Companion animals provide the bridge for many by which to make a connection with broader animal issues, such as the plight of farm animals. Why is PeTA burning that bridge?

Essentially, I agree that more resources ought to go toward spaying and neutering, and I commend PeTA’s work on that front. But I don’t agree with PeTA’s presentation.

Citing a shelter that spent \$9 million for 1,500 animals is rhetorical nonsense. Where did they house their cats - at the Ritz? When PeTA needs to rely on hyperbolic red herrings in order to make its case, how much is that case worth? As a PeTA supporter, it’s troubling to see its rhetorical flourish sink to that level.

In the article, PeTA claims that it is more ethical to spend money on spay/neuter than on warehousing dogs and cats already born. But is that really the only two choices? Hardly.

PeTA’s readers in general and people in the sheltering business in particular have a right to know that there’s

another possibility, a choice less draconian than mass murder to finance mass sterilization (as PeTA ironically if not directly advances).

The Tompkins County SPCA may be the first of its kind. It need not be the last.

Jeff Lydon is the Executive Director of the Tompkins County SPCA, an open admission animal control agency in Ithaca, New York.

PeTA President Ingrid Newkirk’s unethical treatment of animals:

Killing animals in shelters:
the animals got the gift of euthanasia, and to them it was the best gift they’ve ever had.

Killing feral cats:
We do not advocate right to life for ferals.

Killing pit bulls:
Most people have no idea that at many animal shelters across the country, any pit bull who comes through the front door goes out the back door in a body bag. From San Jose to Schenectady, many shelters have enacted policies requiring the automatic destruction of the huge and ever growing number of pits they encounter. This news shocks and outrages the compassionate dog lover. Here’s another shocker: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the very people who are trying to get you to denounce the killing of chickens for the table, foxes for fur, or frogs for dissection, supports the pit bull policy