



AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) Myth vs. Fact Sheet

1. **MYTH: Euthanizing shelter animals with carbon monoxide is safe for humans.**

FACT: EBI is the *only* safe way for humans to euthanize shelter animals.

Decades of research and on-site assistance to shelters regarding humane practices toward animals shows that EBI is the only safe and humane way to euthanize shelter animals:

- Carbon monoxide poses a danger to humans exposed to the gas because it is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and highly explosive. A gas chamber must be constantly checked and maintained to ensure no cracks in the structure or failing seals. An explosion in the Iredell County, North Carolina gas chamber in 2008 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.
- The American Veterinary Medical Association states: “*Carbon Monoxide is extremely hazardous for personnel because it is highly toxic and difficult to detect.*”¹

2. **MYTH: Euthanizing shelter animals with gas is humane for the animal.**

FACT: Gassing animals causes unnecessary suffering and results in an inhumane death. EBI is the *only* humane method of euthanizing shelter animals. Within seconds, EBI brings about a rapid and painless unconsciousness, followed by a medical death within just a few minutes.

- IF successful, the gas chamber can take up to 25 minutes to end an animal’s life. The length of time to cause death is inhumane.
- The American Humane Association considers EBI to be the only humane method of euthanizing shelter animals.
- EBI is the method preferred by the American Veterinary Medical Association and the National Animal Control Association
- *The American Veterinary Medical Association states that carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide is not approved for use on medium to large animals, thus animal shelters must have an EBI backup system.*
- The animals don’t always die in gas chambers: Investigations have shown that some shelter personnel have admitted to breaking kittens’ and puppies’ necks with shovels when they would not die from CO or drowning animals in buckets of water. Pets have also been thrown against walls and beaten.
- Referring to the horrors of carbon monoxide, Doug Fakkema, the nation’s animal euthanasia expert², has stated: “[t]he animal is in a warm or hot box, usually with other animals. They don’t know what is going on. The hiss of the gas is going on inside. They get dizzy, and then they panic. Fights can break out, and animals’ calls can sometimes be heard.”³

¹ See American Veterinary Medical Association Panel on Euthanasia, 2000 Report, 218 J. http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf.

² Doug Fakkema is a trainer and consultant with over 35 years’ experience in animal protection. He conducts euthanasia workshops around the country. He was a shelter director in Oregon and California for 19 years. See Doug Fakkema, Comparison of Sodium Pentobarbital and Carbon Monoxide as euthanasia agents. www.crean.com/kindness/ebi-vs-co.html.

³ Mott, Maryann. Animal Gas Chambers Draw Fire in U.S., National Geographic News, April 11, 2005.

3. MYTH: The gas chamber is the only practical and safe way of euthanizing aggressive and/or wild animals.

FACT: It is dangerous to put aggressive and/or wild animals in the gas chamber. Sedation methods utilized with EBI are safer for shelter staff in cases of highly aggressive and wild animals, and more humane for those animals.

It is much safer to sedate then euthanize by injection an aggressive animal instead of drag them frantically into a gas chamber. Such actions can cause injury to shelter workers. 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 then administer a lethal dose of the drug.
- Wild animals can be sedated or anesthetized prior to the lethal injection, so that they are unconscious prior to handling. Proper training helps ensure that employees are capable of dealing with these types of animals, as they should be if involved in animal care and control.

4. MYTH: Shelter workers prefer to use the gas chambers.

FACT: EBI provides the shelter workers the dignity and humanity they deserve when facing the difficult reality of euthanizing pets.

Shelter workers overwhelmingly 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, even with vigilant oversight, the gas chamber is both severely inhumane and demoralizing to the emotional and physical health of human beings and animals.

5. MYTH: The gas chamber is cheaper than EBI.

FACT: A 2009 study by American Humane shows EBI is less costly to communities.

American Humane recently commissioned a study 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 poisoning 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.⁴ Cost figures from North Carolina are comparable to other states, including Michigan. Thus, EBI is more cost effective than gas.

6. MYTH: It is impossible and too costly for all animal shelters to transition to EBI.

FACT: The vast majority of Michigan shelters have already made the transition to EBI.

- Only 7 Michigan animal shelters currently euthanize animals by carbon monoxide.
- Only 5 Michigan shelters currently euthanize animals by carbon dioxide
- American Humane is a leader in providing training and grant to shelters wishing to convert to EBI, and is prepared to offer guidance to Michigan as it transitions to EBI.

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⁴ See January 2009; Doug Fakkema, Consultant to Animal Care & Control, Commissioned by American Humane Association. *Study available upon request.*