

# How to Find a Humane Animal Shelter

by Ingrid Newkirk

adapted from *250 Things You Can Do to Make Your Cat Adore You*

Leave nothing to trust. Call first, then if you get the right answers, go visit but without the animal. You do not want to be talked into leaving Fluffy or Fido in a nasty place.

Here's what to ask:

**1. What do you require of a new adopter?** Do not accept less than a shelter that requires the following:

- a) Spaying and neutering, preferably *before* the animal is released. (Of course, if you can accomplish this before passing the animal on, that would be very helpful, but be sure there is sufficient recovery time before entering a shelter, where he or she may be vulnerable to viruses from other animals.)
- b) A preadoption home check
- c) Payment for shots, sterilization (if not already performed), and an adoption fee by the adopter. If the adopter cannot afford these start-up expenses, will Fido find himself thumbing a ride to the vet from the curb when he suddenly needs an expensive (is there any other kind?) operation?
- d) A contract signed by the adopter, allowing the shelter to reclaim the animal if the home is not suitable.
- e) Permission from the adopter's landlord or landlady, if the adopter lives in an apartment, to have an animal. Without it, Fluffy may have to walk the gangplank the next time the adopter's landlord comes a-knockin'.

**2. What is your policy on releasing animals to laboratories or dealers?**

This should be a clear, unequivocal "We don't." No waffling allowed. Some pounds and shelters still hand over animals to medical colleges for show-and-tell, hands-on courses, or long-term research into nausea, pain, and the workings of the eyes or brain (this means electrodes are implanted into the animal's skull).

**3. What method of euthanasia do you use?**

The correct answer is "the intravenous (into the vein) injection of sodium pentobarbital." This method is absolutely painless and animals lose consciousness in two to three seconds. Other chemicals can cause discomfort or are downright painful and are, therefore, not acceptable.

If the person you are dealing with rattles off the brand name of a drug, ask, "Is that sodium pentobarbital or something else?" If it's "something else," express your disappointment and dial another facility. If it is sodium pentobarbital, but the person doesn't mention how they administer it, ask. If the answer is "into the heart," try another facility.

**4. Do you allow someone bringing in an animal for euthanasia to stay in the room with the animal?**

Even though you are probably not planning to avail yourself of this service, the answer to such a question can help you judge the facility. The very best shelters actually encourage people to be with their animals when they receive that last shot. To be that open not only shows that the staff has nothing to hide behind that back room door but is also good for the animal and his or her person. Having a loved one, not just strangers, in the room can calm an animal in distress, and the grieving human will always be able to look back and be comforted in the knowledge that everything went well during his or her beloved companion's last moments.

A few humane organizations run placement services. However, do not assume that they have given a blood, I.Q., or any other kind of test to the person whose name and phone number you may receive from them. In fact, some unscrupulous dealers may pose as loving candidates for your Ms. Tiddles through these caring folks' bonafide placement agency. Be prepared to put on your personal inspector's hat and do your own careful checking.

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## **A Word About “No Kills”**

“No-kill” shelters may sound like an attractive option, but because they do not euthanize animals except under extreme circumstances, beware! A very few of them are extremely good, but many others are houses of horror. Visit *without* your cat or dog, and look as well as listen, then ask yourself “Is this *really* a safe and promising place for me to choose?” Because they must limit the number of animals they accept, most no-kill shelters take in only highly attractive, young, or purebred animals, turning away the neediest, such as the sick, the old, and the pregnant gangly mixed breed. Those end up at other facilities, which are then forced to kill animals in order to make room for new arrivals.

At some no-kill shelters, “unplaceable” animals end up living in cages for years. They can become withdrawn, severely depressed, and “unhousebroken” and can acquire antisocial behaviors that further decrease their chances of being adopted. They are the living dead—sentenced to life imprisonment with no chance of parole and with no happy moments in the sun. If one cat in a cage of 50 gets a urinary tract infection, will anyone notice before it's too late? Well-meaning people who take on the huge physical and financial responsibilities of a no-kill shelter can find themselves overwhelmed very quickly, and too often the animals suffer from lack of individual care and attention. Some no-kill shelters have been shut down by humane officials after gradual neglect turned into blatant cruelty. Others simply hand animals over to any takers—without checking to ensure that their wards do not end up in a laboratory or abused.