

# Animal shelter story changes

## Officials' explanations for killings conflict

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WATSONVILLE — Overcrowding, not sickness as reported by a county Animal Services Authority official, was the primary reason 21 animals were euthanized at the city shelter, according to the shelter's new manager.

Shelter volunteers were angered when the director of the agency taking over the shelter said earlier this week that animals had been "warehoused," and that the animals had been put down because of illness.

The animals, mostly cats, were killed Monday, just hours after responsibility for the shelter was transferred from city police to the Animal Services Authority.

"When we first came in there were over 100 animals in the shelter," said Brenna Ewing, new manager of the Watsonville shelter. "In order for us to give the quality of care we want to the total population, we had to reduce the numbers."

Tuesday, Mike McFarland, the authority's director, denied space was a factor in the euthanasia decisions. He could not be reached Friday.

Ewing, who also manages the county's Scotts Valley shelter, said she could not speak for McFarland, but noted he was not directly involved with the decision.

Some animals were sick, she

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# Deaths

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said, including three puppies who tested positive for parvovirus and several cats suffering from ringworm and upper respiratory infections. None of the animals were seen by a veterinarian, Ewing said, and she couldn't say whether any but the puppies had been tested for disease. But she said she trusted the judgment of the workers — an experienced supervisor and a technician.

She also couldn't say exactly how the other animals were chosen to be euthanized, but length of time in the shelter was a consideration.

The agency believes it is inhumane to keep an animal in a kennel for too long, though there's no set limit, Ewing said. Instead, the policy — when space is not an issue — is to determine how well the animal is

holding up under the stress of being caged.

Volunteers, including several who spent 15 hours or more at the shelter each week under the previous management, said they don't think workers had enough time for evaluation Monday.

"There are always these hard decisions that have to be made," said Annette Estupinian, a Scotts Valley resident who has volunteered at the Watsonville shelter for two years. "We understand that, but OK, they were in there for three hours."

Estupinian and other volunteers said they knew the animals and worked hard to create a warm environment. The animals were not, as McFarland said Tuesday, "warehoused," volunteers insisted. Volunteers brought in baskets, blankets and stuffed animals for the cages they helped keep clean. One volunteer bought ceramic bowls for each cage after noticing paper ones frequently spilled, and she

washed the dishes herself. Another did the laundry. They provided loving care to healthy animals, they said, and nursed sick ones back to health. Each animal had a name.

If they had any inkling of what was coming, volunteers said, they would have taken action to find foster homes or other alternatives before the new management arrived.

Christine Price, a Capitola resident and Watsonville volunteer, said she didn't think the police managed the facility well — though some staff members were extremely dedicated — so she supported the takeover. She wasn't surprised sick animals were euthanized, she said, but was shocked to find healthy ones killed as well.

"We thought (the county) would be vastly better in the care for the animals, and now we're having second thoughts," Price said.

Police officials have said they were not properly trained to supervise an

animal shelter.

Lisa Carter is director of the Santa Cruz Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on Seventh Avenue in Live Oak. The former county shelter now serves as a rescue agency for animals at risk for euthanasia. In the past 18 months, it has taken in more than 200 animals from the Watsonville shelter. Carter picked up seven more Monday. The county workers faced painful decisions, she said.

"It's not like that morning anyone woke up and said, 'I want to go in and euthanize 20 animals today,'" she said. "Those people all love animals. That's why they're working in those positions. ..."

"The real villains here are the people who let their animals have litters of puppies and kittens. That causes the problem we all have to deal with."

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