

Animal Welfare
U.S. Humane Society Investigator
Probing County Animal Shelter

An investigator from the Humane Society of the United States has completed a preliminary investigation into the operations of the County Animal Shelter, The Sentinel has learned, and will be recommending a full-scale investigation in the near future.

Eric Sakach, field representative for the Washington, D.C.-based animal protection society, spent Thursday in Santa Cruz conducting interviews and an onsite inspection of the shelter's facilities.

Stating he found no violations of law at the shelter, Sakach emphasized he was not pleased by several aspects of the shelter's operation, and would follow his visit with a set of recommendations that will be sent to the parent body of the shelter, the Animal Welfare Assn.-SPCA, along with county and city officials from Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Capitola.

When contacted this morning, county Poundmaster Hollis Worley declined comment on

the investigation, other than to say that he cooperated with it, and would "give them a lot of credit if they can find things to better our organization. We're all striving for one thing," added Worley. "That's the prevention of cruelty to animals."

Describing shelter facilities as "not aesthetically pleasing," Sakach criticized the lack of adequate dog runs for Building B, and said he observed dogs remaining in the building while the kennels were being washed out. "The dogs should be kept dry at all times," Sakach said.

Sakach also questioned the use of a carbon dioxide chamber for euthanasia, or putting the animals to sleep. The investigator said the chamber is not cleaned after every use, and that often, one animal is placed in the chamber with an animal previously gassed and already dead.

The Humane Society representative also had misgivings about the use of seconal, under

the trade name of Repose, being used as an euthanasia drug, describing it as "quick, but very painful for the animals."

Sakach said he also is looking into reports that one animal control officer shot and killed two rabbits with a .22 caliber rifle while out on a field assignment.

According to Sakach, shelter management also told him that they plan to tear down the existing facilities within two months or more, and erect a totally new shelter.

The Humane Society of the U.S. investigation was launched, said Sakach, because of "considerable complaints" from county residents, former and present employees, and people who reside in the areas served by the shelter in their contract with the county and cities. "There was so much publicity, we decided some-

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Animal Shelter Probed

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thing had to be done," said Sakach.

Data has been collected since April, and Sakach said his set of recommendations should follow shortly. If the suggestions are ignored, he added, "there might be a few problems."

Admitting that complaints against animal shelter organizations are common, Sakach stated, "In this case, we've received so many complaints, there has to be a good reason for it. It's our sincere hope that they would live up to their contract and are hiring people who really care about the animals' welfare."

County supervisors will decide on the future of the contract with the Animal Welfare Assn. in upcoming budget hearings. The county administrative officer has recommended continuing the contract, with the addition of a county-designated management person to keep tighter fiscal and administrative controls over the shelter operation.

By Dale Pollock



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