



**Animal Alliance/  
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## **The Political, Animal Services, and Scientific Case Against Pound Seizure**

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Prepared by

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## **The Political, Animal Services, and Scientific Case Against Pound Seizure**

### Introduction

*Within this complex society, new standards evolve which, by and large, mark our progression to a higher plane of civilization. Perhaps in bidding a grateful, but not reluctant farewell to the use of random-source dogs and cats as research animals, we will better serve the full spectrum of all the many facets of society that together establish it as civilized, and ever more so, as decades roll by.*

David H. Neil, B.V.Sc, M.R.C.V.S.  
Division of Health Sciences Laboratory Animal Services  
Faculty of Medicine, University of Alberta (1989)

The purpose of this brief is to present the case against pound seizure — the practice of selling lost and homeless companion animals to research facilities, and, Animal Alliance and the political party Animal Alliance/Environment Voters' opposition to pound seizure. Opposition to pound seizure is shared by all Canadian humane societies and, according to one poll, perhaps as much as 75% of the public. Ontario remains the only province in Canada that mandates through legislation, pound seizure or pound release.

Despite the legislation, most municipalities in Ontario where it is mandated and in other provinces where it is not, choose not to surrender their animals because they are aware of the serious problems caused by pound seizure.

For sound ethical and management reasons, pound seizure is now well-understood to be not only incompatible with, but antithetical to, modern, effective companion animal protection, services, and control. For equally sound scientific, economic, and moral reasons, many researchers, prestigious research

facilities, and medical schools in North America and Europe do not experiment on animals acquired from pounds — so-called “random source” animals. In some cases these respected institutions are acting voluntarily; others are simply obeying the law.

Pound Seizure and Pound Acquisition Policy, Companion Animal Owners and Political Responsibility

*It is true that many animals in pounds who are not adopted will be euthanized. But this is certainly not an argument in favor of pound seizure. First, it is precisely those animals who are most adoptable that experimenters tend to choose. They prefer docile, well-socialized, medium-sized animals, precisely the animals likely to be adopted.*

Neal D. Barnard, M.D., President  
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine  
Washington, D.C.

Too often companion animal bylaws are based on the premise that dogs and cats are nuisances to be controlled and are, therefore, disposable. Animal services are founded on a model of “waste disposal.” The rationale behind pound seizure stems from this outdated attitude toward companion animals. While some companion animals can, indeed, cause problems, and reasonable controls are needed to address such problems, the fact is that most dogs and cats are important, vital members of people’s homes and families. For many people, home and family are empty — incomplete — without a companion animal. Recognizing this, most progressive municipalities — Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto, Boston, New York, and Washington, to name just a few in North America — have implemented animal services policies that stress making their communities “animal friendly,” and encourage responsible companion animal guardianship through education and positive regulations. This enlightened attitude not only helps people who share their lives with companion animals and helps keep dogs and cats safe, but also significantly reduces conflicts with, and the anxieties of, non-companion animal owners.

The love that most people have for companion animals is often denigrated or dismissed as frivolous, particularly by those who view them as a nuisance or would put them to uses other than companionship. The quality and strength of the love that most people have for companion animals should not be underestimated, particular by elected officials. Many people make enormous sacrifices in time, emotional commitment, and money to insure the comfort, safety, and health of their companion animals.

This unstinting love that people have for dogs and cats can extend beyond the home and family to an animal who is a stranger, but treated cruelly. Love for companion animals is well-founded. Most people — even those who do not

currently live with a companion animal — have fond childhood memories of a loving family dog or cat, and recall how these animals enriched their lives.

When developing companion animal policies, the prudent and responsible politician will respect the deep love that people have for companion animals, and will help develop animal services programs that build on that love. On a more pragmatic level, failing to do so can be a serious mistake.

An American Medical Association study (cited by Dr. David H. Neil of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Alberta) showed that while almost 75% of the public may accept, in principle, the use of animals in research for certain purposes and within certain parameters, only 25% condoned using animals from pounds and shelters. Based on AAC's experience in other municipalities, Ontario residents who live with companion animals would be adamantly against the policy, and would support actions to end it.

### The Adverse Effects of Pound Seizure on Animal Services

*Management and employees of shelters and pounds are adversely affected [by pound seizure], as well. In consultation with numerous jurisdictions, we have never seen an effective animal control program in any city or country which permitted pound seizure.*

Neal D. Barnard, M.D., President  
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine  
Washington, D.C.

The seemingly pragmatic argument for pound seizure is that if a pound animal is going to be killed anyway, and every effort has been made to adopt the animal out, why not make it available to research? After all, there's no point in wasting a perfectly good animal, and what harm can come from it?

Effective animal services programs are only possible with the whole-hearted, enthusiastic support and confidence of companion animal owners, animal services staff and management, and the general public. Pound seizure undermines public confidence and support, and demoralizes animal services personnel. The reason is that most people who share their homes with companion animals or work in animal services tend to have a deep affection for dogs and cats, and the very thought of them being experimented on is anathema. Many people will not take a lost or homeless companion animal to a pound that sends animals to research. Neal D. Barnard, M.D. states,

*“When people know that pound seizure is routine, they tend to leave animals on the streets. These animals are likely to breed more litters, carry parasites, or contract diseases such as distemper or rabies, which, in turn, can aggravate public health problems.*

Studies in New Mexico and Washington, D.C. showed that pound release practices erode public confidence in animal control facilities. A tough job gets tougher.”

Barnard’s experiences are echoed in the policy statements of many groups involved in animal services. The policy statements of the Kansas City, Missouri-based National Animal Control Association and the Tampa-based Florida Animal Control Association are typical:

“The National Animal Control Association opposes pound seizure laws (which mandate the sale of animals from shelters to research).

- “1. Such laws infringe upon the rights of animal shelters to determine the fate of animals in their care.
- “2. Such laws hinder the efforts of progressive animal shelters to promote animal welfare in a collective atmosphere of public trust.
- “3. Animal research is clearly a personal decision which should be decided by individual animal owners without involvement of animal shelters.”

“The Florida Animal Control Association recognizes that many in the field of medical research believe that there is a need for the use of live animals in experimentation. However, FACA believes that the practice of pound seizure undermines the effectiveness and public trust in animal control and protection programs. For these reasons FACA opposes pound seizure laws that require either public or private animal control or protection facilities to release animals for animal experimentation.”

Based on its years of working closely with people staffing pounds and shelters, AAC can testify that shelter personnel are deeply troubled by sending animals to research. Most find it difficult even euthanizing animals, but they can morally justify it with the knowledge that they did their best to find the animal a new home, and that the animal’s end will be gentle and humane. When the animal is sold to a research facility, however, he or she is utterly abandoned to an undeserved and uncertain fate. And, despite the calm assertions of researchers, shelter workers know there is no guarantee that the animal will not suffer in cruel, chronic experiments. No one should underestimate the insidious and debilitating effect that sending innocent animals to research can have on a caring person who works in animal services. Some cope with the cumulative emotional effects by resigning. Others become inured to the suffering, often to the detriment of their own emotional well-being, and to the compassion and dedication that their job demands. In the end, the animals suffer — animals whose only crime was being homeless or lost.

In AAC's 19 years of experience with the pound seizure issue, in every case where pound seizure was banned, animal services programs and adoption rates improved, and euthanization rates declined. Data from Calgary, Alberta, where Animal Services stopped giving to research in 1993 is indicative and compelling.

Calgary, Alberta Animal Services Statistics 1984-1999

(Source: City of Calgary Animal Services)

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
<b>Animals impounded</b>	4237	4102	4006	3841	3703	3068	2583	2433	2154	3063	3433	3637	4170	5241	4971	5005
<b>Sold to university</b>	300	282	219	291	256	217	154	152	73	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Returned to owner or adopted</b>	2375	1917	2179	2379	2468	2162	1855	1804	1731	2742	3254	3460	3929	4932	4706	4767
<b>Euthanized</b>	1450	1747	1413	991	825	605	508	348	253	182	83	71	100	118	82	127

(NOTE: Totals may appear incorrect. A small number of animals identified as "Others" — which include, for example, animals still held at the end of a year — have been omitted for clarity.)

When pound seizure was routinely practiced in Calgary in the mid to late 1980s, only about 50-60% of impounded animals were returned to their families or adopted; 30-40% were euthanized. By 1999, almost 97% of animals were being returned to their families or adopted, and the euthanization rate dropped to around 2%. Another important direct benefit enjoyed by Calgarians because of their Councillors' decision to implement a progressive animal services program, which included a pound seizure ban, is the decline in dog bite incidents: from 1.03 bites per 1,000 in 1984 to 0.45 bites per 1,000 in 1998 — a 56% decline.

The reason for these improvements is that when communities adopt animal services policies that use "best practices," and serve the best interests of the animals and companion animal owners — rather than the interests of researchers — public support increases, and pride, morale, and job performance improves among animal services staff. This in turn results in lower costs and dramatically improved effectiveness of animal services programs.

The Research Community and the Pound Seizure Dilemma

*The "pet factor" may actually be disclosing something important for our inquiry, namely that communication of a sort does go on between humans and other species and that this is important support for the view that animals ought to be treated as subjects and not merely as objects. People who protest against animal experimentation (and other "uses" of animals) out of their appreciation of their pets ought not to be dismissed out of hand as hopelessly sentimental and biased, but rather might be seen as contributing to an emerging discussion about the role of*

*communication in alerting us to the presence of a moral dimension in the relationship between humans and animals.*

Report of the Ethics Subcommittee (1995)  
University [of Alberta] Animal Policy and Welfare Committee

Despite what some researchers might say, there is considerable disagreement and disquiet in the scientific community about the ethics, science, and economics of using lost companion animals acquired from pounds and shelters for experimental purposes. A full discussion is beyond this brief, but a number of issues can be highlighted to help clarify the debate.

Because the concerns about using lost companion animals in research are so valid, academic institutions like the University of Alberta, and intramural researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in the United States make no use of pound animals. The rapidly growing list of medical schools that no longer use dogs — random source or purpose bred — include: Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, Harvard Medical School, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Mayo Medical School, Stanford University School of Medicine, and Yale University School of Medicine. In Canada, most medical schools do not use live animal laboratories, including the University of British Columbia Faculty of Medicine, the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine, and Queen's University School of Medicine. European researchers stopped using animals from pounds decades ago. Indeed, one 1984 paper by the Italian researchers Mantovani and Ioppolo carried the title: "*A Useless and Superseded Experimental Animal: The Stray Dog.*"

Lawrence A. Hansen, M.D., Associate Professor of Pathology and Neuroscience at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine (UCSD) said, "Some argue that no one wants to kill dogs, but it is a necessary evil for medical education. But since graduates of Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and the Mayo Clinic medical schools (and most others in the U.S.) have become pretty good physicians without killing dogs, it's hard to avoid concluding that dog vivisection is not necessary. Once you remove the 'necessary' from necessary evil, only the evil remains."

"As an alumna of UCSD School of Medicine, class of 1976, I agree that doglabs for the physiology/pharmacology course should be modified, so as not to utilize live dogs. I remember my doglab of 25 years ago very clearly: Everything could have been taught in the absence of the dog, much as we learned the other aspects of the course material. The thought of those large, healthy dogs, one for each four students, being sacrificed without apparent justification still haunts me. I wish the alternative ways of teaching the course had been employed then," said Leslie A Mark, M.D., Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine, Division of Dermatology, UCSD.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH publication 72-333),

"In addition to altering experiment results, the use of pound dogs may also increase research costs, in spite of the initial low cost of the dog...The cost of the dogs is a minor part of the expense, yet the untimely death of each subject dog escalates the overall cost of experimentation."

Dr. David Neil, University Veterinarian, Faculty of Medicine, University of Alberta explains, in part, why lost or homeless companion animals seized from pounds make poor experimental animals, and why their use can make for bad science:

"[W]e really are not in a position to genetically define the random-source animal. Furthermore, we are unable to provide health records, or clinical history for these animals. If indeed, we had such information, it may well be that more of these animals would be disqualified for use at time of receipt."

Neal D. Barnard, M.D. argues that:

"The problems [caused by using animals from pounds and shelters] may cause experimental results to be uninterpretable. As a result, more animals are then used in repeat experiments. So rather than save money or animals' lives, the use of animals from this source often costs more money and more animals' lives."

Perhaps the most candid expression of the conflicted positions within the research community was expressed by the University [of Alberta] Animal Policy and Welfare Committee in their 1995 report:

"The dramatic conflicts between extremists in the animal rights and scientific communities which have been highlighted in the media have not contributed to resolving the debate. While most researchers deem animal experimentation not only necessary but ethically defensible, many express personal reservations about some of what is being done.

"We continue to believe that clarity is not served by posturing or adopting strategies for winning at all costs. But we also know that opinions on this question are held very strongly and that behind the passion lie very laudable values. At least we choose to operate on this assumption, even though self-interest and economic gain may not be far beneath the surface for any of us. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we do not shirk from raising the questions for the scientific community which are embedded in the current cultural turmoil about animal experimentation. "

Within the research community itself, there is wide disagreement about the scientific value, the economic benefits, and the ethical rationale of using lost and homeless companion animals in research, in particular, and animal experimentation in general. As the University of Alberta Animal Policy and Welfare Committee reported,

“We believe it to be an essential part of our responsibility as members of the University community that we discuss the ethical dimensions of our work in an open and non-defensive manner. To do otherwise is only to court the public’s worst suspicion: that we cannot transcend our own self-interest any better than anyone else.”

The debate is further fuelled by two other factors. The first is that too often mistakes are made, and loving companion animals are sent to research facilities before distraught families have an opportunity to find them. In the past in Alberta and more recently in Ontario, grieving owners learned too late that their companion animals had been sold to researchers. As the Edmonton Sun reported on 29 January 2000 in an interview with Roger Simms, head of the Edmonton SPCA, “At least a dozen family pets come close to dying on a University of Alberta lab table every year, due to mistakes made at the city pound” said Simms. “It’s got to be 12 dogs a year easily. And we’ll never know how many fell through the cracks — weren’t caught before they were put down.”

Secondly, the motive behind much of the research community’s defense of pound seizure is political and strategic, having less to do with the merits of actually ending pound seizure and more to do with the fear that bans on pound seizure might encourage further restrictions on their use of animals.

### Conclusion

The evidence against pound seizure is compelling and unequivocal. The damage pound seizure causes to municipal efforts to provide effective animal services is well-documented, as is the improvement in animal services when pound seizure is banned. The evidence that some researchers use to defend pound seizure is dubious and misleading at best; self-serving and knowingly wrong at worst. There is no evidence that banning pound seizure has any negative impact on critical medical research, or in any way puts human health at risk.