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October, 2012

[Interview With A Lethalist](#)

Did you use to work at an Australian animal shelter?

Yes.

What was your job title?

Animal Attendant (Level 2)

What was the description of your role?

I worked as an '*Animal Attendant*' caring for animals at the shelter. I have a Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing and I worked as the after hours '*Ambulance Driver*' where I picked up sick and injured animals, and I was a '*Lethalist*'.

Lets talk about your job as a Lethalist.

How many hours were dedicated to the role of a 'Lethalist'.

I worked full time, but euthanasia was scheduled for approximately 2 hours of every day.

At the shelter you worked at, how was euthanasia performed?

Euthanasia was performed by injecting a lethal dose of intravenous Sodium Pentobarbital. It depresses their breathing which finally stops the heart. I was also in charge of mixing up the drug from powder to liquid form.

Did the shelter you worked at use a gas chamber?

No.



Was the action of euthanasia the same for feral and domestic animals?



No.



Feral cats would be placed into a crush cage and given an injectable sedation as they did not stay still and did not eat due to stress. They had to be sedated to make them easier to handle.



What happened next?

The feral cats were then given a lethal dose of intravenous Sodium Pentobarbital.

In your opinion, did some animals struggle with the end of life procedures and need extra medication?

Yes, some did.

For example, sometimes the animals veins would rupture due to either the animal moving or incorrect technique. I chose to be the 'injector' rather than the 'holder' of the animal because some staff were not competent in finding veins.



To check whether an animal was dead, a large needle was placed directly into their heart, rather than checking with a stethoscope. This was done because a high level of environmental noise made it impossible to hear with a stethoscope. If the heart was found to still be beating, an extra dose of Sodium Pentobarbital was injected directly into the heart.

If an animal was frightened or aggressive, how did you administer the medication?

Aggressive dogs would be given Acepromazone tablets for sedation in their food prior to being euthanased. Some were then brought into the room on catching poles by staff and euthanasia was performed.

Feral and aggressive cats were given injectable Acepromazone and then euthanased.

Was it difficult to transport the aggressive dog from its holding bay to the euthanasia room?

Sometimes it wasn't because I spent time making friends with the dogs labelled 'aggressive' by the inspectors, so I would be able to walk them to the room on a lead and I would have a better handle on them when they were euthanased.



Were you given the reasons why the animals were listed for euthanasia? If so, what were they?

Daily lists were compiled by Office Staff with reasons for the euthanasia. The reasons were labelled by inspectors, vet workers or due to shelter policy and generally the reasons were not reassessed.

Some euthanasia reason were:

- . date due out (a legal time in which a Pound had to hold dogs, it was 7 days if not microchipped)
- . lack of space
- . owners request
- . it had bitten people
- . aggression (labelled by the inspector who brought in the dog)
- . cat flu, ear mites
- . feral and type of breed (all pit bull type dogs were euthanased regardless of behaviour).

How were the bodies of the animals destroyed?

The shelter that I worked at did not have an incinerator on site. The bodies were not individually wrapped, but placed in a lined general waste bin, left overnight and then driven to the dump site the next morning. They were dumped at the local tip where general house waste is disposed.

Sometimes I would see the animal body bags that I had disposed of on a previous day sticking out of the rubbish and sometimes I could see trucks driving over the bags of carcasses.

In your opinion, what type of animal was euthanased the most?

It was cats.

This was because the shelter ran out of room or the cat had cat flu. If one cat sneezed in the "For Sale" area, often the whole cattery would be killed. I took one 'cat flu' cat home as I fell in love with it. This cat is a very happy and healthy cat to this day.

I also have three cats that were labelled 'feral' by the inspector who brought them to the shelter. They were placed on the kill list. I took them home and they all live happy lives with me. In my opinion, they were not feral cats.



I had also taken quite a few kittens home to raise until they were old enough to place on the adoption list.

If you liked a particular animal, the staff would wait until you had a day off and it would be euthanased while you were not there.

When you were not performing euthanasia on animals, what other jobs did you do at the shelter?

The other jobs I performed at the shelter were varied. Some duties included cleaning kennels, checking animals for illness, administering medications, prepare food, groom and exercise animals, provide enrichment, checked animals for ID and inserted microchips.

Did the role of euthanasia effect you personally?

It had a huge impact on me.

I chose to work at an animal shelter because I love animals. But in the end I felt I was being told to euthanase animals for no valid reason. There were many animals that I euthanased that could have been adopted.



The way I felt also had an impact on the animals because I felt less emotionally available to them and my work. Because of this I approached my Supervisor and requested that they provide access to a counselling service for staff that perform euthanasia. But I was told no. The reason being that staff may abuse this service and discuss personal issues that occurred outside of work.

I remember a time I had to euthanase a dog at the direction of the Shelter Manager whilst the owner was in the room. It was one of the most difficult cases I experienced. The dog was young, I didn't know why I had to euthanase it and I felt under pressure to do this in front of the owner.

I was told on my interview that the role of lethalist would be a part of my job. It was not something I had applied for. If you did not 'cope' with the task you were given, you were seen as being 'weak' or 'soft', and needed to toughen up.

I felt that my objectives of helping animals were not being fulfilled at the shelter, so I resigned.

Thank you for your time and choosing to talk with me.

Thank you for letting me tell my story.



Australians bring home over 600,000 dogs and cats every year, while Australian shelters kill over 250,000 every year. There are enough homes.

All animals that enter the shelter system deserve compassion, and all salvable animals that enter the shelter system deserve to live.

The majority of shelter operations are financed with donated money. Money that has been donated to help shelters save animals.

These actions do not reflect how donors want their money spent, and do not reflect the compassionate attitudes of the Australian public.

Demand No Kill and demand smart sheltering.

