

Your Solution to Pet Overpopulation - Seventh Grade

OBJECTIVE

To understand the issues concerning pet overpopulation.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students will learn some of the reasons for and consequences of pet overpopulation and write about ways that we can all help address the problem.

MATERIALS

- Writing materials

DISCUSSION

- Use the Pet Overpopulation Fact Sheet included with this lesson to help students learn about and understand what pet overpopulation is and what it means to their community. If you have access to a computer or other literature on the subject you can incorporate it into your discussion.

LESSON

- Have the students write an essay on the ways they think pet overpopulation could be solved.

POST DISCUSSION

- Share the ideas/solutions with the class.
- Discuss the ideas/solutions that are favored as well as the ones that are not. Why do some seem more likely to work than others?

PET OVERPOPULATION FACT SHEET

What happens where there are too many dogs and cats and not enough homes to care for them all?

Pet overpopulation is a serious problem. As a result, animal shelters become overcrowded and are unable to care for the millions of homeless pets that end up there every year. New strays and discarded family companions arrive continuously, yet there is not nearly enough space for them all. Of the almost 7 million cats and dogs that enter animal shelters every year, only about half of them are adopted or reclaimed by their owners. This means that an estimated 3.7 million are euthanized in animal shelters across the United States annually.

Since animal shelters are so overcrowded, the cats and dogs that end up there have little time for a chance at being adopted. Any that do not get adopted are euthanized to make room for others that arrive daily. Most of the animals that are killed are healthy and loving but because people don't neuter or spay their pets, there just aren't enough homes to go around. For example, in six years, one female dog and her offspring can produce as many as 67,000 puppies. In seven years, one unspayed cat and her offspring can potentially produce 470,000 kittens. That would be the equivalent to one cat for every man, woman, and child in New Orleans, Louisiana in the United States!

What are the Causes of Overpopulation?

The problem of overpopulation is not a problem with just one cause. Several factors contribute to the issue:

- **Lost pets.** Not all pets who are lost are found by their owners. In fact, only about 16% of dogs and about 2% of cats are ever recovered by their owners. This is either because the owners don't check their shelter or don't check often enough. Many of the losses could be prevented if owners keep collars with ID tags on their pets or have them microchipped. A microchip that has an owners contact information can be placed under a pet's skin by a veterinarian and can help shelters identify who the pet belongs to.
- **Abandoned pets.** Some pets are deliberately abandoned by their owners for many different reasons. Sometimes they are left to fend for themselves in the wild or on the streets. Cats in particular often live a lonely, hard life out in the streets trying to survive on their own. These cats are often feral, and do not make good pets.
- **Breeding.** People often breed their pets on purpose so that they can sell them. Many purebred dogs come from puppy mills that over breed and sell to pet stores for enormous profit. Since puppy mills are often raided due to poor conditions and the animals brought to animal shelters, it makes the overcrowding problem worse and the chances of adoption is greatly effected. Also, many of the purebred dogs that are purchase from pet stores have health problems due to over breeding and ultimately end up at shelters.

PET OVERPOPULATION FACT SHEET - CONTINUED

- Social attitudes. Some people are not prepared to provide lifelong homes for their pets. Over 30% of the animals who are surrendered to animal shelters are there because their owners can't or don't want to care for them anymore.

The Solution: What Are Some of the Things You Can Do?

Spay and neuter your pet

Adopt pets from an animal shelter.

Tag and/or microchip your pet.