



## Fact Sheet The Pet Theft Myth

The California Biomedical Research Association, as well as the entire research community, is opposed to the use of stolen pets for medical research. Pet theft is a crime, and we support the efforts of federal, state, and local authorities to enforce all applicable laws. While there is a need for dogs and cats in some limited medical research, scientists neither want, nor need, to use pets. We hope the following information will reassure pet owners, and counteract the damaging belief that research is routinely done on pets.

### **“Pet Theft” is an Urban Legend**

The "Pet Theft Myth" is a popular piece of propaganda put forth by those opposed to animal research. Like most urban legends, the sensationalism and hysteria surrounding the tales of shadowy figures who cruise residential neighborhoods luring pets into vans and selling them to research labs is guaranteed to provoke outrage among pet owners and generate media coverage for the animal extremist movement. It has little basis in fact.

### **The Pet Theft Myth and Animal Activism**

Animal activists typically charge that as many as two million pet dogs and cats are stolen every year and sold to medical researchers and laboratories. Based on the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which is required by law to keep detailed statistics, in 2004 a grand total of 64,932 dogs and 23,640 cats were involved in biomedical research – far less than the 2 million claimed to have been stolen for research. The *vast majority* of cats and dogs involved in biomedical research are purpose-bred for research and have NEVER been pets. Statistically, therefore, the assertions of animal activists are *impossible*. (The number of dogs used in biomedical research has *declined* 66%, and the number of cats used in biomedical research has declined 64% since 1973). In fact, nearly all the animals needed for medical and scientific inquiry in the United States are rats and mice. Dogs and cats *together* account for less than 1 percent of animals used in all of medical research each year. While some animals are indeed stolen, officials believe that many are being routed to dog fighting enthusiasts, who use them to train or "bait" their more aggressive breeds, such as pit bulls.

While these number may seem large, it's important to keep this number in perspective:

- Each year, more than 9.6 million unwanted or unclaimed dogs and cats are euthanized in animal shelters and pounds in the United States.
- Wildlife biologists estimate that over 1 million animals are killed *every day* by automobiles.
- The *total* number of dogs and cats necessary for research represents about .02% of all animals killed by automobiles and in pounds each year.

### **Where Do These Research Cats and Dogs Come From if They Are Not Pets?**

The U.S. Animal Welfare Act includes tough restrictions on how and from whom dogs and cats can be acquired for research purposes. The USDA is charged with enforcing the Animal Welfare Act and all associated regulations, including those pertaining to this issue. The majority of dogs and cats used for medical research were specifically bred for research. They were never pets. The cats and dogs that are used in research that were not specifically bred for research are purchased from USDA-licensed and regulated Class B dealers or acquired directly from shelters pounds after efforts to locate their owners failed and euthanasia was the only remaining option. It is important to remember that the majority of dogs and cats used in research *have never* been pets.

### **How Does the USDA Know that These Animals are Not Pets?**

The USDA's regulatory duties under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) include licensing Class B dealers who buy and sell random source (non-purpose bred) dogs and cats for research. In areas where research facilities are not allowed to purchase animals from pounds, Class B dealers supply animals that are older, genetically diverse, or have specific physiological abnormalities, characteristics that are extremely important to certain types of medical research, especially cardiac studies. The 1985 AWA amendments required Class B dealers to keep records on *each individual* dog and cat, including the person who sold it to the dealer. While Class B dealers are allowed to obtain animals from pounds, the USDA requires that those animals be held at the pound for five days and on the dealers' premises for five or 10 days, depending on whether the pound was public or private. This means that the USDA-mandated holding requirements for these animals are 10 to 15 days. These holding periods ensure that owners searching for a lost pet will have time to find the animal, or that adoptive homes might be found for unwanted pets and pets not found by their original owners. In addition to this federally mandated waiting period, dealers must complete and maintain extensive paperwork on *each* animal, and that paperwork transfers to the research institutions, which must keep it for three years.

Since the 1970s, the USDA has been responsible for inspecting all Class B dealers and their facilities to ensure that federal animal welfare and record-keeping requirements are met. If dealers or facilities fail to comply with these tough standards, the USDA imposes strict financial penalties and can temporarily *suspend* or permanently *revoke* the licenses they need to continue doing business. The USDA also requires all dealers to certify that holding periods are observed and to maintain a thorough and very specific description and record for each animal, including details regarding the animal's source. The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) inspects Class B dealers four times per year, and research facilities at least once each year, for compliance with all AWA regulations and standards. APHIS inspectors check the accuracy of records by comparing them with the records kept by other dealers in the same marketing chain. While this record-keeping system is not foolproof, it effectively discourages thieves from selling stolen pets through regular market channels. In 1993, there were more than 100 Class B dealers selling dogs and cats to research, but only 40% of their animals could be traced back to the original owner. The USDA stepped up enforcement of record-keeping requirements through fines and by suspending or revoking licenses and APHIS inspectors began conducting intensive "trace back" audits of these records. Many dealers stopped selling dogs and cats for research, but among those that remained, the success of trace backs increased rapidly to more than 90%. "That means that in nearly 100 percent of these cases, we were able to trace animals back to their original source and thus verify that they had not been stolen," wrote APHIS administrator Terry L. Medley in a 1998 letter to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture. As of 2001, only 20 Class B dealers were selling dogs and cats to research, and the success rate in tracing their animals back to the original owner had climbed to 96%. Thus the public can have a high level of confidence that research animals are being legally acquired and that pet theft for research is no more than an urban myth.

### **There Are Tough Federal Laws Against Stealing Pets for Research**

Under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), it is a federal offense for any person to "buy, sell, exhibit, use for research, transport or offer for transportation, any stolen animal" or to obtain live random source dogs and cats by using false pretenses, misrepresentation, or deception.

### **Even Some Animal Activists Acknowledge There is No Problem**

One leading animal-protection newspaper reported in 1998 that it found no evidence of stolen pets being sold to research facilities. According to Merritt Clifton, editor of *Animal People*, the newspaper confirmed previous findings that the 1990 Pet Theft Act amendments to the Animal Welfare Act appear to have virtually halted sales of stolen animals for laboratory use since taking effect in January 1992. Clifton presents convincing evidence that illegal dog fighting is a far more likely explanation for reports of many missing dogs. This is especially true in several states where animal welfare and law enforcement authorities have recently been inundated with complaints. Dog fighting, although a felony in 44 states, nonetheless continues in many parts of the country. It is believed that many stolen dogs are being routed to dog fighting enthusiasts, who use them to train or "bait" their more aggressive breeds, such as pit bulls. According to Clifton, a rash of recent thefts took place along three specific interstate routes in Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, and in the South, where dog fighting rings are known to operate and where police have made a number of felony arrests in recent months.

### **Missing pets: What You Can Do**

Unfortunately, dogs and cats are indeed stolen – some for ransom, others to be used in illegal dogfights or for

hunting, others to be sold in black markets overseas. Most often, however, when a pet disappears, it has been hit by a car, attacked by a wild animal, poisoned, or simply and truly *lost*, not stolen. The California Biomedical Research Association recommends that all pets wear collars and identification tags at all times. Tags, implanted microchips, and even tattoos can help to reunite a lost cat or dog with its family. In addition, CBRA also offers the following advice in finding a lost pet.

- Advertise in your local paper and place notices in public places. Repeat this at least weekly. Many supermarkets have such listings, as do some local radio shows. Pets can travel long distances so be sure you search widely.
- Call your local animal shelter or pound and visit it regularly. Telephone calls alone may be insufficient. Communication among the employees may be imperfect so all employees may not be aware of the animals there. Be sure you know how long animals are held, and if possible ask to review records. Take them a picture of your pet for easy identification.
- See if the local schools will let you place notices on their bulletin boards or in their student paper. Children and pets often find each other.
- Contact your veterinarian and let her or him know your pet is missing - particularly if your pet is wearing a local rabies immunization tag that carries the veterinarian's/ animal hospital's number.
- Ask businesses that people who live in the area are likely to use to put up a copy of your flier. This includes gas stations, fast food restaurants, taverns, and convenience and grocery stores. Ask if you can put a copy of your flier up in the pet food aisle. If someone picks up your animal and holds it for a few days hoping you will find them just as your pet did, they will need food.
- Contact local rescue organizations and give them copies of your flier. People who are afraid animals will be euthanized if they turn them over to the shelter might contact a rescue, and rescue people often go through local shelters looking for animals they can help place in new homes. Ask the shelters if they know of anyone doing rescue in the area, even if they don't work with them.
- Give copies of your flier to veterinarians, groomers, trainers, and pet stores.
- Give copies of your flier to people who walk their dogs in the area. They're more likely to spot animals than most people. If you go to the parks early, you may find people who regularly walk their dogs together as an informal group.
- Alert the local agency that deals with injured or dead animals; sometimes this is the animal control agency, other municipalities use the health department for this function.
- Unfortunately, the next most successful way of finding a lost animal is through checking with the highway departments and the shelters' dead lists. Even if your pet is wearing tags and highway maintenance is supposed to send a list to animal control, you should check with them directly.
- There are usually several departments that cover roads in your area. You'll need to check city or town, county and state roads departments, as well as the animal control agencies. Pictures or a copy of your flier should be left with each department. Again, calling is seldom successful, and actually visiting the department is the best way. You should check back once a week.
- Contact the Missing Pets network <http://www.missingpet.net/>, a group of volunteers sponsored by the USDA Animal Care Office, for additional tips on how to search. This is a nationwide listing.
- Finally, don't give up hope; often the first advertisement or notice is missed, but a subsequent one is seen.

### **Animal Research for Animal Health**

More than 80 medicines and vaccines developed for humans are now used to heal pets, farm animals, and wildlife. Pets, livestock, and animals in zoos live longer, more comfortable, and healthier lives as a result of animal research. Animal research has helped develop animal vaccines to fight such animal diseases as rabies and distemper in dogs and cats, feline leukemia, infectious hepatitis virus, and tetanus. It has also led to treatments for heartworm, therapies for cholera in hogs, and preventive techniques for tuberculosis in cattle and influenza and encephalitis in horses. Where would animal care be today without vaccines against rabies, distemper, feline leukemia, tetanus, parvo virus, infectious hepatitis, and anthrax? Animals have been helped with treatments for artificial joints for dogs, treatments for pet cancer and pet heart disease, antibiotics for infection, and treatments for vitamin deficiency in animal diseases such as rickets. Techniques such as ultrasound and "CAT" scans are commonly used in veterinary medicine today. Animal research has helped preserve nearly extinct species, such as the California condor and the tamarins of Brazil, due to new reproductive techniques being applied to endangered species. Research has significantly contributed to programs of artificial insemination in species such as elephants, pandas, and other endangered species.