

AIRPORTS / ANIMAL SERVICES

City Teamwork Saves Puppies

Airports, Animal Services team up to save dogs from puppy mill plight, and put them up for adoption.

Ten purebred jet-setting "puppy mill" survivors were available for adoption from LA Animal Services Dec. 20, highlighting the need for domestic law enforcement officials to focus more attention on the horrors of the international "puppy mill" industry both in the United States and abroad. Puppy mills are factory-style dog-breeding operations that provide a non-stop supply of purebred puppies to a public with a seemingly insatiable appetite for them.

The plight of the five Yorkies and five Maltese puppies intercepted at LAX with falsified health documentation in June is a prime example of how the demand for purebreds has created a situation ripe for abuse. City Councilmember Tony Cardenas joined Ed Boks, General Manager of LA Animal Services and other local officials today at the East Valley Animal Care Center to unveil the puppies and discuss their significance in a context that touches not only on local pet overpopulation but also international trade and homeland security.

In June three shipments of puppy mill dogs flown into LAX from the Far East on Seoul, Korea-based Asiana Airlines were intercepted and confiscated by LA Animal Services and LA County Public Health officials. Ten dogs survived: five underage Yorkies and five eight week-old Maltese puppies. However, accompanying health certificates falsely claimed they were four months old and ignored health issues present when they arrived.

"Federal Law requires imported puppies under three months old to be quarantined until one month after they receive their rabies vaccination, which means five months of age in California," said Ed Boks, LA Animal Services general manager. "Incorrect paperwork could lead to puppies not being quarantined or vac-

nated appropriately, placing other animals and humans potentially at risk. Combating these violations is labor-intensive and we need to fight for support at all levels of government to be able to do a more thorough job."

This enforcement action prompted the November formation of an unprecedented multi-agency animal cargo task force to conduct a three-week survey of incoming animals at LAX. The goal was to determine the volume, types and condition of animals entering the country via international air carriers. The Task Force, led by LA Animal Services and LA County Public Health, included the Los Angeles World Airports, U.S. Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Transportation Security Administration, plus local animal control agencies SEAACA, Humane Society of San Bernardino Valley, Inland Valley Humane Society, Long Beach Animal Control, Santa Ana Animal Control, Orange County Animal Care Services, Pasadena Humane Society, Riverside Animal Services, and SPCA-LA. The task force conducted 88 full inspections and chronicled dozens of additional shipments during the survey period.

"This task force is an outstanding example of interagency collaboration of a sort we strive for in all of our law enforcement efforts," said L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

While complete results of the survey are still being compiled, preliminary findings demonstrated that puppy mills are not only a U.S. problem. Overseas commercial mass dog-breeding facilities that put profit above the welfare of dogs are attempting to flood the U.S. market even as domestic agencies work to increase shelter adoptions and fight pet overpopulation on the local front. Because the imported animals could carry disease or be used in outlandish smuggling schemes, these inspections also have both public health and homeland security implications. The survey found at least five shipments with falsified documentation, involving more than 35% of the dogs inspected during the three-week period.

The ten puppies rescued in June were available for adoption Dec. 20, with interest in them running high. In such cases, LA's Municipal Code Article 3, Section 53.11 currently requires that each one be made available through an auction if more than one party wants to adopt the animal.

These puppies are more fortunate than many puppy mill survivors. In the loving care of LA Animal Services for five months they have recovered from or avoided the typical diseases, injuries and behavioral issues that often manifest in puppy mill dogs unwittingly purchased from pet stores. However, the Department is still concerned that these survivors could develop other types of physical or behavioral issues as a result of improper breeding and poor living conditions during their formative first weeks of life.

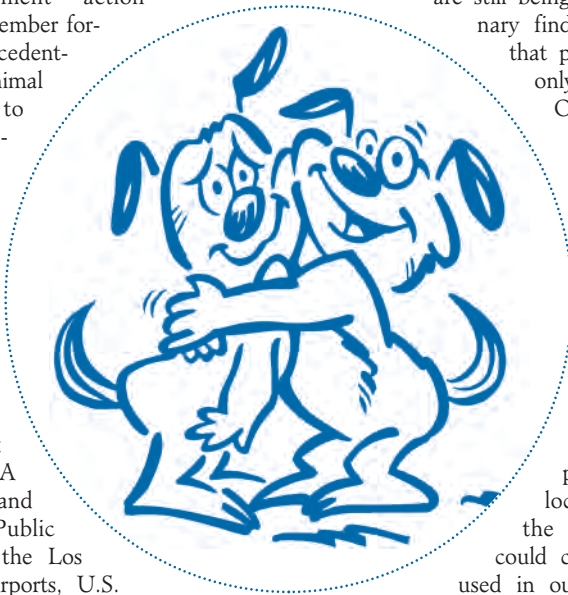
LA Animal Services is utilizing the City ordinance required adoption-auction process to help ensure that the new owner/guardians of these puppies will have sufficient financial means to afford the medical costs that are likely to be incurred over the lifetime of these animals.

Councilmember Tony Cardenas introduced the puppies to the public and the media at the East Valley Animal Care Center earlier last month.

"Puppy mills are inherently as inhumane an operation as one can imagine," Cardenas said. "While these puppies are popular with kids and families, they don't know what kind of treatment or inbreeding they've been subjected to. When you add the rigors and stresses of overseas transport to the mix, you're asking for serious problems. Animal Services is approaching this the right way, with the long-term welfare of the dogs in the forefront."

"The challenge is daunting," said Boks. "South Korea's Ministry of Environment recently reported it intends to categorize dogs as livestock to regulate the sanitation practices of large-scale dog breeders.

According to the ministry, there are about 720,000 dog farms in South Korea, raising some 2.3 million dogs as of December of 2005."



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