

Looking in the Mirror at **Euthanasia**



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NIAA Animal Care Committee, April 1, 2008

Why We Kill Animals



- Untreatable illness/condition → unacceptable quality of life
- Genetic/congenital problems
- Insufficient productivity, no longer serve purpose
- Accidents (e.g., on-road, on-premise)
- Disease control
- Unwanted
 - Surplus population (e.g., homeless dogs/cats, unwanted horses)
 - Wrong type (e.g., bull calves, male chicks, aggressive dogs)
 - Nuisance (e.g., wildlife, feral cats, stray dogs)
- Also...food, fiber, other product = slaughter

Acceptable Approaches Meet Certain Criteria



- *Eu + thanatos* = “good death”
- Animals are free of pain, apprehension, anxiety, distress
 - Immediate loss of consciousness
 - Lethal injury
 - Irreversible (animals do not recover)
- Technique is reliable and efficient
 - Equipment is readily available and properly maintained
 - Repeatable
- Safe and acceptable for personnel
- Compatible with subsequent use/disposition of tissues
 - Food
 - Pathologic analysis
 - Disposal
- Public acceptability (may have to pass the “smell” test)

Role of Situation



Number of animals, type of animal, environmental conditions may...

- Change approach
- Do *NOT* remove our responsibility to kill as humanely as possible

Techniques Available



- Physical—disruption of brain activity
 - Projectiles, blow to the head, dislocation/decapitation, electrocution, maceration
 - Rapid loss of consciousness
 - As sole method—disruption of centers controlling cardiac and respiratory function
- Inhalant agents—hypoxia
 - CO₂, CO, Ar, N₂; anesthetics
- Injectable agents
 - Barbiturates;
chloral hydrate, KCl (with anesthesia)
- Combinations



Euthanasia Can Go Badly

Errors of...

- Commission
- Omission

Errors of Commission



- Wrong approach
 - Species inappropriate
 - Situation inappropriate
 - Not fully evaluated to ensure it meets euthanasia criteria
- Untrained or insufficiently trained personnel
- Unavailable or ill-maintained equipment
- Lack of confirmation of death
- Lack of back-up or emergency plans
- Attitudes of personnel
 - Ambivalent
 - Compassion fatigue
- Insufficient supervision
- Failure to apply the “smell” test
- Healthy animals ???

Errors of Omission



- Failure to identify animals needing euthanasia
 - Insufficient observation (e.g., incomplete, infrequent)
 - Unrealistic expectations for future (e.g., excess populations)
- Delays in euthanasia
 - Animal will get better
 - Attempts to salvage value
 - Questionable research end-points
- Attitudes of personnel
 - Not my job
 - Uncomfortable with skill level
 - Compassion fatigue
- Insufficient supervision

Errors in the Public Eye...



- Hanging pigs (Ohio)
 - Humane Farming Assn undercover video
 - Unsanctioned technique
 - Didn't pass the "smell" test
 - Focused attention on other on-farm euthanasia approaches
 - Cruelty charges filed

- Wood chipper for adult poultry (Calif)
 - Precipitated by Newcastle Disease emergency depopulation
 - Technique never evaluated
 - Didn't pass the "smell" test
 - Cruelty charges considered

Errors in the Public Eye...



- Intracardiac injection of unanesthetized shelter animals (Tenn)
 - “Unacceptable” (and illegal) technique
 - Failure to confirm death
 - Restraint used also an issue
 - Cruelty charges filed
 - Veterinarian’s license suspended

- Live chickens in landfill (Wisc)
 - Inappropriate application of technique
 - Failure to confirm death



Errors in the Public Eye...

- Downed animals
 - Failure/delays in identifying animals needing euthanasia
 - Attempts to salvage value
 - Chino slaughterhouse
 - Charges filed
 - Single largest meat recall in US history

Errors in the Professional Eye...



- Questionable research end-points
 - Delay in applying euthanasia

- Owned companion animals
 - Delay in choosing euthanasia
 - Personnel attitudes

Getting it Right



- Upper management adopts and promotes a positive euthanasia philosophy that is transmitted and advocated throughout the organization

Animals that should be euthanized are identified and killed humanely, promptly, and with minimal stress on the animal and staff.
- A euthanasia plan is developed and implemented
- Euthanasia plans and preferred processes will vary by species, facility type, and the roles and expectations of those involved
- Compliance with the overarching philosophy and preferred processes is mandatory
- Unjustified deviations from those processes are condemned and result in termination of employees involved

The Euthanasia Plan



- Decision trees (why and when to kill) are created to improve and bring consistency to process; staff should participate in developing these trees
- Preferred techniques/approaches are identified for each animal type (e.g., species, life stage) in the operation
 - AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia (see www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthansia.pdf)
 - OIE Appendix—Killing of Animals for Disease-Control Purposes (see www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en_chapitre_3.7.6.htm)
 - Varies species-specific documents available from species/practice-dedicated organizations
- Appropriate equipment and training are provided, including instructions for verifying death
- Equipment is properly maintained and procedures are audited

Getting it Right



- Decisions to kill (or not kill) animals are made at the highest level of authority
- Decisions to kill (or not kill) animals are transparent
- Killing should *NOT* be delegated to lowest-ranking workers
- Individual staff should have an option to not participate; their decision is free of repercussions
- Euthanasia plans should be reviewed on a regular basis with the attending veterinarian and with all personnel; personnel should be tested to ensure understanding and proficiency
- Whether the plan will pass the “smell” test is always considered (social license)

A word of thanks...



- Members of the AVMA Animal Welfare Committee
- Dr. Taylor Bennett, past AVMA Panel on Euthanasia
- Dr. Terry Whiting, Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives

Thank You for Your Time
and Attention!

