



Animal shelter opts for injections

Montcalm Co. want to stop using gas

Last Edited: Friday, 21 Nov 2008, 12:07 AM EST
Created On: Thursday, 20 Nov 2008, 6:10 PM EST

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MONTCALM COUNTY, Mich. (WOOD) - The Montcalm County Animal Shelter plans to stop its long-time practice of euthanizing animals through carbon dioxide poisoning, opting instead for lethal injections.

The county's new animal control director, hired last May, submitted an application to the state of Michigan for permission to administer the injections

Animal Control Director Patty Lentz also objects to the use of shelter animals for research and hopes county commissioners will elect not to renew a contract with R & R Research. In return for disposing of the shelter's deceased animals, R & R has been able to choose living shelter animals to use for research.

The county expects to learn anytime if the state has accepted its application to begin lethal injections. The county will then need to approve the change. When that happens, Lentz will turn to the federal Drug Enforcement Agency for permission to purchase and store the necessary drugs.

"I just feel this is more humane. It's quicker. There's less stress on the animal," said Lentz, who worked for Isabella County Animal Control for 18 years prior to accepting the Montcalm County job.

The county has been criticized for its use of carbon dioxide barrels. A barrel is filled with the gas and the animal placed inside alive. The worker then shuts the lid.

It takes seconds for the animal to die, but Lentz says it's still stressful.

"I don't know what goes through the animal's head, but I'm sure it's not pleasant," said Lentz late Thursday afternoon. "I'm sure there's fear. They're scared. They don't understand."

Lentz, who pointed out that she cannot speak for the county board, said she personally opposes doing research on pets.

"I probably would not want my pet to go to research," said Lentz. "I know there's a need for research. My feeling is, if they're going to be used for research, have them raised in that atmosphere so they do not know anything different. They don't know what it's like to sit on a lap every night. They don't know human affection."

The R & R contract expires in February 2009. The county commission will make a decision at that time. Lentz said there are other non-research related companies with which the county could contract to dispose of deceased animals.

Lentz replaced director Kevin Weaver, who resigned last March amid controversy. He was accused of abusing animals, though prosecutors decided there was not enough evidence to charge him. Citizens had also complained about how the shelter was run.

The new director said adoption has "risen tremendously" since she took over in the spring. She gives much of the credit to her staff, which she said cares greatly about the animals.

Lentz put the Montcalm County shelter on Petfinders.com, to allow families to search for adoptable pets online.