

## Dog Shelters and Donations

A brief guide to America's shelters, who is taking credit for what, and where your donations go.

By Wayne Cavanaugh

Did you ever get mail from the "humane society"? Donation solicitations, Christmas cards, free address labels? Was it from the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the American Humane Association (AHA), or the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)? Did you ever wonder who they are and what they do? What about during disaster relief efforts, did you ever wonder where to send your donations?

Don't know the answers to these questions? You are not alone. Even among the most dedicated dog lovers there is huge misunderstanding and confusion when it comes to our nation's shelters and the SAS – that is, the Shelter Alphabet Soup that comes with them.

In the late 1990's, a group called the California Coalition of Animal Advocates convened to try to find answers to issues dog-related population issues. Their work included a study to find out who and where the animal shelters were in America. It sounded easy enough until they discovered that a national list of shelters did not exist, and, contrary to popular opinion, there wasn't a "humane society" or any other type of organization that oversaw all of America's shelters!

So who, what, and where are the nation's shelters? Who are these big fund-raising groups, and how are they related to shelters? Where do they get their money, and who is running them? To start, the coalition funded a study to create shelter list of every shelter in America. They knew it would always be changing and would never be complete, but they also knew it would be a lot better than what existed, which was nothing. They hired university graduate students to do the only thing that would work – the students called every town, municipality, city, village, township, hamlet and county in America and asked if they had a shelter, what they called it and who ran it. The answers were interesting and the list was compiled. Today, there is still no national organization overseeing or coordinating America's shelters.

### **Here are some facts that most people do not realize**

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) does not operate a single animal shelter in America or anywhere else. That's right, not one. Makes you wonder how many people send them money thinking they were the local animal shelter. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) does operate a shelter and an animal hospital - they are both in New York City. That's it, a New York City shelter only. It is a highly regarded shelter, but New York clearly isn't the nationwide shelter list some people think of when they think of the

ASPCA. To be fair, the ASPCA does humane work all over the nation, but as far as operating shelters, well, no. The American Humane Association (AHA) operates no shelters, but does have about 300 shelters that are affiliated and agree to maintain AHA standards of care at their shelters.

What about the SPCA? Is there a national organization called the SPCA (society for the prevention of cruelty to animals)? Nope. Sorry. "SPCA" is simply a term, or abbreviation, used for most any animal shelter but it is NOT a nationwide organization. It's a generic for what we say instead of "dog pound", "animal shelter", or "humane society". Now you can see the confusion! When national groups use words like humane society, or letters such as SPCA in their name, people think they are giving to their local shelter. But they, of course, are not.

So who runs the local shelter in your town? It could be anyone from volunteers, to your local government, to a private party. Many rural areas simply have a person, with a few extra kennel runs, which the town pays to house the strays. In more populated areas where actual dedicated buildings exists, the shelters are funded by any combination of tax dollars, donations, adoptions fees and dog license fees. (It is interesting to note that the shelters house dogs and cats, but since hardly anyone licenses cats, the dog license fees pay the bills for both dogs and cats.)

These shelters are named anything from the "SPCA of Whatever County" to the "Humane Society of Whatever Township", but are not affiliated with either national group, the ASPCA or HSUS. Within a county or state, the shelters may meet for educational purposes or to share information but not as a member of a national fund raising group that operates and fund shelters.

So what does the ASPCA, HSUS, and AHA do with all of their money if it is not going to your local shelter? Each has their own agenda. They all advertise, use money to raise money, and draft and lobby for legislation. Some

may agree with none, all, or some of what they support. The AHA has the contract to oversee and ensure the safety all animals used while filming a movie. They have done so for years and have done an admirable job. However, they are also opposed to hunting. So are the ASPCA and, obviously, HSUS. Do they help protect animals? Yes, they do. But does their agenda agree with your individual ideas and philosophy? Hang on, you better check. Check a lot. Go to their websites. Call them. Dig deeper into their agendas. See what legislation and advertising campaigns they are spending donated money on.

HSUS for example, in addition to the troubled PAWS legislation, is also spending donations on a new campaign to prevent America's youth from hunting before they are 18 years old. (For those familiar with the PAWS bill, this is typical HSUS – set limits first then adjust them to extinction!) These campaigns and laws are often being funded by well intended people who think they are giving to their local shelter! But you now know that is not true.

With Hurricane Katrina, watch the big PR money being spent by some of these groups, and other dog organizations, as they exploit the hurricane victims by trying to raise money that goes who knows where. Is that money all going to relief? Let's hope so. We have heard that good money is starting to get spent in the hurricane ravaged areas. Or is some going to fund anti-hunting and anti-breeding legislation? It almost seems as though where some see despair and horror, others see a PR opportunity, so who knows?

The bottom line is that there are thousands of shelters in America, all of which are individually operated and funded locally. They always need resources and support. Then, there are large groups who raise money by using the goodwill of words like "humane" and "cruelty" in their national name. To add another layer of concern, while your local independent shelter is not run by HSUS, AHA, or the ASPCA (unless you are in New York City); you really have no idea what the mission of your local shelter is. Your job is to ask.

There are many, many excellent and worthy local shelters that need your donations and will use them directly to help dogs. But before you open your wallet, ask what will be done with your money.

Consider donating food and supplies which can't be as easily used to pay government lobbyists. Ask what they believe in. Then ask yourself what you believe in and where you draw the line. We should and we must help those less fortunate. We must not forget the people and the dogs that need help from the hurricane. We must do so from our hearts, though, and not to take credit or exploit the situation. And we must make sure our efforts are in line with our private individual beliefs.

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