

## IACP Position Statement on Mandatory Sterilization of Dogs

The International Association of Canine Professionals strongly opposes legislation which mandates the sterilization of dogs. It is our conviction that the decisions involved regarding the breeding of dogs should be left in the hands of owners, and should not be regulated by government entities.

Sterilization procedures are major medical operations which may threaten the health, development and temperaments of dogs<sup>i</sup>. No surgery is free of risks. The IACP believes that the decision to subject an animal to such procedures should remain the responsibility of the dog owner and veterinarian, and that government mandates are an intrusion upon this relationship.

Some legislative proposals would require the sterilization of dogs before physical maturity. Several studies show that juvenile sterilization causes skeletal and muscular development anomalies, increased aggression and sexual behavior, increased risk of certain cancers, and also removes animals from the gene pool well before their temperaments and abilities can be assessed<sup>ii</sup>. Sterilization can also adversely affect training and performance<sup>iii</sup>. The IACP is strongly opposed to juvenile sterilization mandates.

Mandatory sterilization laws are generally proposed with the stated goal of reducing shelter populations. However, shelter population studies show that far more dogs are surrendered to shelters for reasons other than the inability of breeders to find homes for new litters. In fact, the majority of shelter surrenders are due to owners relocating to housing which does not allow dogs, adolescent dogs engaging in inappropriate behaviors, illness (of either animals or owners), and owners' inability to bear maintenance costs<sup>iv</sup>.

Animal shelter populations and euthanasia rates have been declining in recent years to the degree that many shelters are experiencing a shortage of mixed-breed, adoptable puppies and small adult dogs. As a result, some shelters are importing dogs from other states and even other countries<sup>v</sup>. This practice raises issues of marketplace competition with private, local breeders -- issues which previously have not been a consideration the operation of animal shelters, and would not be emerging if there were not enough homes for dogs suitable for placement.

The canine genome is incredibly diverse and complex, capable of producing dogs of many sizes, shapes, colors, temperaments and physical abilities. Careful, selective breeding has produced hundreds of varieties of dogs suitable for companionship and partnership throughout the long history of the domesticated dog by narrowing genetic traits. Yet, a certain level of diversity must be maintained within each breed to ensure genetic fitness. Mandatory sterilization policies threaten to eliminate a large number of individuals from the gene pool before their potential and suitability for breeding has been realized, thus reducing the gene pool to dangerously low levels.

In consideration of these and other facts, the IACP believes that the issue of animal shelter populations is complex and cannot be addressed adequately by government mandates. The IACP believes these issues are better addressed by educating dog owners and canine professionals, providing access to low- or no-cost sterilization programs, and promoting responsible and ethical breeding practices through individual breed clubs and organizations.

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<sup>i</sup> Sanborn, Laura J.: Long-Term Health Risks and Benefits Associated with Spay / Neuter in Dogs. (Citations included in article) <http://www.naiaonline.org/pdfs/LongTermHealthEffectsOfSpayNeuterInDogs.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Chris Zink, DVM, PhD.: Early Spay-Neuter Considerations for the Canine Athlete, © 2005.

Dawn M. Cooley, Benjamin C. Beranek, Deborah L. Schlittler, Nita W. Glickman, Lawrence T. Glickman and David J. Waters. Endogenous Gonadal Hormone Exposure and Bone Sarcoma Risk, Departments of Veterinary Clinical Sciences [D. M. C., B. C. B., D. L. S., D. J. W.] and Veterinary Pathobiology [N. W. G., L. T. G.], Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907, and the Gerald P. Murphy Cancer Foundation, Seattle, Washington 98125 [D. M. C., D. J. W.]

<sup>iii</sup> Whitney, Leon F., DVM. Dog Psychology, The Basic of Dog Training. 15th ed. New York: Howell House, Inc., 1989, pp.160-162.

<sup>iv</sup> National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy: *The Top Ten Reasons for Pet Relinquishment to Shelters in the United States*: <http://petpopulation.org/topten.html>

<sup>v</sup> Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, Center for Animals and Public Policy: *The Animal Policy Report, March 2000*.

**Other resources:**

National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy:  
<http://petpopulation.org>

National Animal Interest Alliance:  
<http://www.naiaonline.org/articles/archives/redefining.htm>