



A Guide to Puppy Mills

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I am Kasper Halevy, the founder and leader of the Animal Advocacy Club at the International School of the Peninsula. As a graduation requirement, I was asked to conduct a community service project. Because I am passionate about helping animals, I decided to write a paper about puppy mills. Since I discovered my passion for animals, I heard a lot about puppy mills but I never did in-depth research about them. All I knew is that puppy mills are dog-breeding factories that have absolutely no regard for the wellbeing of the dogs being bred. So, I thought that I would do research, not only to further educate myself, but also to spread awareness to the public about this topic. I hope this article that I wrote gives you a good idea of what puppy mills are, why they are so inhumane, and what you can do to not support them.



Contents

Introduction

What are puppy mills and what do they do?

What conditions do puppies and their parents (brood bitches and dads) live in?

How do puppy mills contribute to overpopulation and euthanasia?

What is the difference between reputable breeders and puppy mills? How can I recognize a puppy mill?

What are the rules?

Bibliography

Introduction

You may have heard of puppy mills before, most likely in a not so positive context. “Always consider adoption before purchasing a pet, don’t support puppy mills!” “Puppy mills are cruel!” “Never buy from a pet store!” What makes puppy mills so bad? What are puppy mills? What do they do? These (and more) are all topics that will be covered in this report. Some descriptions of the conditions in the puppy mills will most likely be heartbreaking. However, do not let the fear of knowing our canine friends are suffering prevent you from reading this. As dog lovers, it is in our best interest to educate ourselves about such an important issue, take action, and also encourage others to do the same. With that said, let’s dive right into our discussion.

What are puppy mills, and what do they do?

Let’s start with defining a *puppy mill*. It is a commercial dog-breeding enterprise, which can contain as few as 50 dogs or as many as above 1,000. Puppy mills mass-produce puppies while forcing the dogs (puppies and parents) to live in terrible conditions that include malnourishment, lack of veterinary care, and frequent physical and mental abuse (this will be discussed in detail later).

Why do these mills exist? First, there is a great demand for them, as people are willing to pay a good chunk of money to get a designer puppy (purebred) as opposed to mutts (mixed breeds). Second, because they are able to conceal their operations (to be discussed later). And third, for profit. Although in our society the profit motive appears “normal” (who in business isn’t motivated to make a profit?), owners of puppy mills, intent on making a profit at all costs, infamously completely disregard the wellbeing of the dogs and puppies in their care.

Based on the following descriptions, puppy mills seem to have no means to make money. If it is publicly known that they mistreat animals and are inhumane, where do their consumers come from? How do puppy mills hide their heinous operations? Let's take a look at who buys dogs from puppy mills.

1. Pet stores. Stores such as PetSmart and Petco have recently refused to sell puppies because of the inhumane nature of puppy mills (and most mass-breeding operations). They even host adoption days for local animal shelters, which is awesome. However, other pet stores are not so, well, pleasant. Pet stores mainly buy designer puppies (aka purebred) from these mills, as one designer puppy can fetch between 500 and 3,000 dollars. How do pet stores conceal that a given puppy came from a mill? They simply label a scared and sick dog as an outgoing and healthy family animal. Of course, these stores are also not transparent in regard to the source of their puppies. Inside pet stores, besides food, water, and shelter, the pups don't have much else. Disease spreads easily due to lack of veterinary and hygienic care, and being surrounded by humans (whom by this point they identify as abusive) puts them under constant stress and fear.

2. Internet. With the human race growing more and more reliant on the Internet, it has become a prime revenue-generating outlet for puppy mills. Not only does the Internet attract many consumers, but it also allows the puppy mills to skip the step of selling puppies to pet stores (who, in turn, act as the suppliers) and to make even greater profits. Worst of all, one puppy mill can run multiple websites, so even if one site is identified as a mill, that mill can continue to count on numerous back-ups. The Internet also enables puppy mills to paint a very appealing picture of themselves and their puppies (as they can select which pictures to upload, which information to disclose, and so on). All this leads to more consumers, more money, and an increased longevity of puppy mills.

3. Flea markets and roadside sales. Similar to on the Internet, it isn't necessary to have a special license to sell products in a flea/street market or as a roadside seller. If you pick up a puppy at these markets (which can be very easy, given how cute the pups are and the luring merchandise such stands display), you and the puppy have very little interaction beforehand, so how can you know what the puppy's personality is like or the diseases the animal could have! (And that may result in abandonment of the animal, which will be discussed later in the article.)

What conditions do puppies and their parents (brood bitches and dads) live in?

By now we know that life is very miserable in a puppy mill, as described above. However, let's take a deeper look into each bad quality of life category, specifically for dog parents. Note: A brood bitch is a female dog used in breeding to produce more offspring.

Environment

Picture your bedroom when it is completely empty and imagine that you are a pregnant dog in this environment. Now, imagine your floor changing from the hardwood/carpet/whatever material into a surface covered with feces in solid, semi-solid, and near-liquid conditions infused with urine. Your walls have turned into cage bars as if you were in prison. Your walls also move closer and closer to you until the dimensions of your bedroom are 6 inches on all sides. And then imagine you have several roommates, who, as well as yourself, are pregnant whenever physically possible. There has to be something other than feces and urine in the cage, right? Toys? Entertainment? The sad truth is that no there is virtually nothing besides the above-mentioned items in a puppy mill cage, except for food and water bowls. Then, picture sharing this space with 10 to 12 litters in that

environment, having sore feet from the harsh cage floors (if it is not already covered with feces and urine), and getting zero exercise. Finally, these cages are either kept indoors (where pregnant dogs get zero outdoor exposure) or outdoors (where they have to bear the freezing winter or the scorching hot summer, as well as bugs and rodents crawling around everywhere).

As for the puppies, the environment is essentially the same as for a brood bitch and the male dogs. The cage is inundated with feces and urine, the cages (either kept indoors or outdoors, both of which have many problems) are small, only food and water bowls are present, and these puppies are stuffed into cages along with multiple other puppies, allowing zero movement (in addition to no comfortable surface to rest or move on).

Food and water

The most basic survival necessities are food and water. If anything, surely these poor mothers should have decent food and water?

Unfortunately, that is not the case. Food is inadequate (to maximize profits, puppy mill owners usually provide the cheapest and least nutritious food), and water rations are barely enough to survive (especially because these dogs have to split the rations with cage mates). Additionally, brood bitches might not have enough food and water to provide for the puppies in the womb (leading to birth defects). The bowls are rarely washed and are shared with other dogs in the cage and, as a result, are dirty and likely to be carrying diseases. Fights for extra food and water to support the puppies growing inside the womb are often frequent, and in extreme cases, dogs in these conditions have reverted to cannibalism.

The situation is similar with the puppies. They also rarely eat from clean bowls, have barely sufficient food and water, and need to share bowls. Since, like their mother, the puppies have to share a crowded cage and food bowls, the

spread of disease is increased. Fights for food and water are also common, and in extreme cases, the puppies too practice cannibalism just to get some extra food in their stomachs.

Veterinary/health conditions

Let's start with the brood bitches. A brood bitch is given no veterinary care, even though she could easily have more than 50 puppies before she is killed. If she dies because of a health problem (or any problem, for that matter), the mill owners don't care (because they have many more female dogs). If the brood bitch is in pain or needs reproductive health care to deliver healthy puppies, she is also ignored. Worst of all, if she complains about her absolutely dreadful conditions, the people who run puppy mills often abuse her because she is "misbehaving" (even though she is pregnant). Additionally, as soon as a brood bitch can no longer be impregnated/produce offspring (which is usually around 6 to 7 years of age), she is euthanized. Keep in mind that the average lifespan of a dog is from 10 to 13 years. Not only do brood bitches miss out on nearly half of their life (barring their being rescued), but also during the short time that they are alive they are brutally overworked and have zero health care. The same applies for the dog dads, except they aren't pregnant.

Just like his parents, the puppy also gets minimal medical attention. From 4 to 8 weeks of age a puppy is taken away from his mother. Very often a puppy is taken away from his mother before being weaned. That means that the puppy does not know how to eat anything except his mother's milk, which very often leads to that puppy's early and heartbreaking death. Since the mother is not cared for properly, it is common for a puppy to be born with a genetic mutation. Such puppies are euthanized or abandoned. And they have serious health problems even if they do reach a pet store or are rescued. Furthermore, that same brood bitch could keep on producing more genetically mutated puppies with the same genetic mutation, as the mill owner simply does

not care. It can't get much worse, right? Sadly, this is not the case. Since, as we have emphasized throughout this article, puppy mill owners care only about money, and they do not spend extra money for higher quality cages or food or water for the transportation to a pet store. So many puppies die on the way to the pet store due to dehydration, injuries from a bumpy ride, suffocation, and more.

Finally, here is a list of common diseases/disorders puppies develop upon arriving at a pet store:

- Epilepsy
- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Musculoskeletal disorders (such as hip dysplasia, luxating patellas, and others)
- Endocrine disorders (diabetes, hyperthyroidism)
- Blood disorders (such as anemia, Von Willebrand disease, and others)
- Deafness
- Eye problems (such as cataracts, glaucoma, progressive retinal atrophy, and others)
- Respiratory disorders
- Giardia
- Parvovirus
- Distemper
- Upper respiratory infections
- Kennel cough
- Pneumonia
- Mange
- Fleas
- Ticks
- Intestinal parasites
- Heartworm
- Chronic diarrhea

Mental and psychological abuse/illnesses

Human interaction is vital for dogs' mental wellbeing; after all, dogs are "man's best friends." Do puppy mills take that factor into account? Of course not! Puppies have very little,

if any, interaction with humans, and when they do, they are either abused for misbehaving or are in the process of being transported to their potential death. Consequently, these puppies already have many psychological problems and emotional scars that are present once they find a home.

In a study conducted by Franklin D. McMillan of Best Friends Animal Society, McMillan gave the owners of 1,169 former puppy mill dogs a questionnaire to fill out related to their dogs' behavior. Here are some of the behaviors that were prevalent in McMillan's sample:

- Stares intently at nothing visible
- Always seems like she is in another world (clueless to her environment)
- Not aggressive—not friendly—just there—very "stoic"
- Can't focus
- At times regresses into unknown fears and won't come to the owner or even runs away
- Has "doggy dementia," gets disoriented
- Has unprovoked and unexplained temper tantrums
- Creates an imaginary line that he won't cross
- Goes in and out the doggie door repetitively
- Obsessively runs back and forth in the yard until worn out
- Jumps and rolls on the floor and slams his body on the floor
- Sometimes rips his own fur out

For more information regarding the study and the behaviors of puppy mill dogs, please visit this website:

http://www.wp.iafriends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/4_TheHarmfulEffectsOfPuppyMillsonBreedingDogs.pdf

How do puppy mills contribute to overpopulation and euthanasia?

As of December 2016, there were an estimated 10,000 puppy mills in the US (USDA licensed and unlicensed). Out of those 10,000 puppy mills, an estimated total of 2.02 million puppies were sold (1,011,046 sold from USDA licensed mills). Every year, about 3.3 million dogs enter shelters. As of 2018, 670,000 dogs were euthanized in shelters every year (which is an improvement over 2012, when the total figure was 2.6 million, and in 2009, it had reached 3.7 million). 25% of dogs in shelters are purebreds, and puppy mills produce purebred puppies. Of course, not all of the 25% of purebred dogs in shelters come from puppy mills, but because people tend to prefer purebreds rather than mutts, the majority of that 25% are most likely products of puppy mills.

From these statistics we can derive that puppy mills contribute significantly to pet overpopulation. Overpopulation is already a huge problem in itself because people do not/refuse to spay and neuter their pets. However, when puppy mills contribute to overpopulation, the issue becomes significantly worse.

What is the difference between reputable breeders and puppy mills? How do I recognize a puppy mill?

There are many differences between a reputable breeder and a puppy mill owner in multiple aspects. Let's take a look at them.

1. Fundamental goals/values. A puppy mill owner, as we very well already know, is motivated solely by money with no regard for the animals that help him earn it. However, a reputable breeder works very closely with medical professionals and veterinarians to ensure the health of his animals. A good

breeder will not forcibly breed a dog with a potential hereditary disease or any reproductive health problems. Furthermore, his dogs go through a screening process for specific issues (orthopedic, heart, eyes, and so on). Finally, a reputable breeder does not lie on his website (or at all!) about his dogs' personalities, medical history, and so on. A puppy mill owner does none of the above.

2. Size of operation in one facility. Reputable breeders usually do not mass-produce puppies relative to the size of their facilities. Good breeders realize that if the scale of the operation appears to be too large, it would be harder to ensure that all their dogs get the care that they need.

3. Affiliation with local and national breeding clubs. As you can probably guess, this attribute describes reputable breeders. Another reason why good breeders do not operate on a large scale is that they usually belong to a breeding club that sets the rules, taking the dogs' health into account. Another perk to belonging to a breeding club (which helps you differentiate between a reputable breeder and a puppy mill) is that a reputable breeder can offer excellent references. Reputable breeders are open to acknowledging who they work with (club, partners, and so on) and can point you to other breeders if they do not have the dog of your choice.

4. They will allow you to return the dog. To ensure their credibility, most reputable breeders will give you a certain amount of time (once you take in a certain dog) to change your decision in adopting that dog. Of course, once you have already made the decision, it is, honestly, not a good idea to return the dog to the breeder. He will most likely have already bonded with you, and it would make him sad he probably won't ever see you again.

Suppose you are shopping for a pet and are trying to find a suitable puppy from a good breeder. The first rule of thumb is never to go to a pet store, as the puppies there most likely were shipped from puppy mills. The next most viable

option is the Internet. Once you find a website that displays a dog you really want, look for information about the breeder. If little information is provided as to location, history, breeding club affiliation, and the dog's medical history and lineage, that is not a good sign. The second step (no matter the case) is to coordinate a meeting with the breeder at the facility. If that request is declined, that is not only a bad sign, but also a big red flag. You are strongly advised not to try to obtain the dog from there.

Assuming your facility visit request was accepted, your third step is to visit the facility. Look out for the things mentioned on the numbered list. Do the dogs look happy? Is there sufficient equipment? Does the facility look like a giant farm (this is a bad sign)? You should also ask the breeder to meet your desired puppy's parents and to see their condition, as well as the puppy's littermates. Why? Let's say you meet the littermates, and they look completely different from the puppy (same case with the parents). That would seem suspicious!

For a more detailed explanation on what to expect once you arrive at a breeding facility, please watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkSPy1L4JjI>.

What are the rules?

Rules and policies do exist regarding ways to recognize puppy mills. However, these rules (mainly provided by the USDA) are way too lax. USDA-certified puppy mills exist, which are suspicious because the USDA could be accrediting puppy mills! The worst-case scenario is that around 1 million puppies are sold from certified facilities. Clearly, something is very wrong with these rules.

Realities of enforcement

The USDA enforces the AWA, or Animal Welfare Act, but enforcement is spotty. Here is

what a puppy mill owner can do under the improperly implemented AWA as of 2018:

- There is no limit to the number of dogs on the premises. A puppy mill could have hundreds or thousands of dogs.
- There is no requirement for the number of staff members who must be available to care for the dogs.
- Dogs can be kept in stacked cages.
- Mesh or wire flooring is allowed.
- Dogs are provided only enough food and water to survive and barely rudimentary veterinary care.
- Dogs can be forced to relieve themselves in their cages.
- Dogs can be confined in spaces only six inches larger than their bodies, not including the tail.
- A dog can be caged 24 hours a day for his or her entire life, only removed from the cage to be bred.
- There is no exercise requirement if dogs are housed with other dogs.
- Human interaction with the dogs is not required.
- Breeding females at the first heat cycle and every other subsequent heat cycle is permissible.
- Unwanted animals can be killed or auctioned off.

Many of the AWA requirements are vague. Even if the AWA is enforced to its fullest, the law requires only the bare minimum of shelter and care. What is considered "adequate care" is often up to the breeder, and that usually does not end up well.

For more information on the USDA, AWA, and the rules regarding puppy mills, please visit this site: <https://www.thepuppmillproject.org/relevant-laws/>.

Some good legislative news

On October 13, 2017, Governor Jerry Brown signed California A.B. 485, the Pet Rescue and Adoption Act, into law. It bans the retail sale of commercially bred dogs, cats, and rabbits in pet stores all over the state. The law went into effect on January 1, 2019, and requires all California pet stores to only sell dogs, cats, and rabbits obtained from local pet shelters, humane societies, and rescues. California is a pioneer in passing such a bill.

Many cities, counties, and townships have passed so-called “pet store bans,” local ordinances prohibiting the retail sale of commercially bred dogs. Currently, more than 230 of these ordinances have been passed, and more localities are enacting similar bans at an increasing rate. Consult <https://lcanimal.org/index.php/campaigns/puppy-mills/puppy-mill-facts>.

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