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Animal shelters nationwide face shortage of euthanizing drug

By [Guy Gugliotta](#), [John Zebrowski](#)
The Washington Post

Animal shelters across the country are running out of the lethal drugs needed to destroy an estimated 6 million sick and unwanted animals each year, the Humane Society of the United States says.

The drug shortage arose because Ganes Chemical Works, of Pennsfield, N.J., has curtailed production of sodium pentobarbital, the principal raw material for veterinary euthanizing agents, while it changes its manufacturing techniques.

Ganes Vice President Michael Pavlak said the company was the only one in the United States that made sodium pentobarbital for animal use. He confirmed that the company had run out of the chemical but said it expected to resume shipments by the end of April or the beginning of May.

Meanwhile, however, veterinary facilities around the country are reporting dwindling supplies and have begun contemplating a return to carbon-monoxide gas chambers, a method largely discarded as inhumane.

"We estimate that up to 3,500 animal shelters may be impacted," said Humane Society program director John Snyder.

Don Jordan, director of Seattle Animal Control, said the city has plenty of the drugs it uses to euthanize animals. He said the city orders its supply of drugs - which go by names such as Euthanize-D and Fatal Plus - from another manufacturer and doesn't expect a shortage to arise.

The city destroys about 2,000 dogs and cats a year. Jordan said that although some shelters are considering moving to carbon monoxide to kill the animals, the city doesn't consider it humane.

"Basically, you're suffocating them," he said. "I'm not in a position to say we are 100 percent against it. But it would certainly be the last option we'd consider."

Veterinarians who administer lethal injections containing sodium pentobarbital use 1 cubic centimeter of solution per 10 pounds of body weight, said Dayna Foster, director of the Warren County (Va.) Humane Society. In springtime, when many animals get sick or are abandoned, Foster said she may use an entire 100-cubic-centimeter bottle of euthanizing agent each week.

"I have one bottle left," she said, and no intention of using carbon monoxide when that runs out. The gas chamber is "very slow," Foster said. "I do perform euthanasia here, but the only way I could do it and sleep at night is the lethal injection."

In late 1998, the Food and Drug Administration warned Ganes about sterility safeguards in its production systems. Sodium pentobarbital also is used in a variety of anesthetics for human use.

At first, Ganes tried to correct its discrepancies while maintaining its production schedule at normal levels. But in a second inspection last December, the FDA outlined further problems, causing Ganes to "reorganize our priorities," Pavlak said.

Seattle Times staff reporter John Zebrowski contributed to this report.

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