

Puppy Mills – Beware of the Puppy Scam

By District Attorney Summer Stephan

There's a reason it's against the law for pet stores to sell puppies from commercial breeders: because they often come from puppy mills, which are unscrupulous and cruel high-volume breeding grounds in which mother dogs can spend their entire lives in heartbreaking conditions.

The San Diego bill was signed into law last year, but still allows pet stores to partner with rescues and shelters for adoption events. Many pet owners don't know that when they buy a dog from a pet store or over the Internet, that pet most likely came from a puppy mill, where dogs live in small cages, often in the minimum legal size allowed.

A local example involves a woman named Carrie, who found an adorable labradoodle puppy through a "home hobby breeder" on Craigslist. She agreed to buy a 7-week-old puppy for \$800 and met the breeder in a grocery store parking lot. The second night home, the puppy seemed agitated and would not settle. Carrie figured it was typical rehoming anxiety. The puppy had a couple bouts of diarrhea through the night and the next day the puppy seemed lethargic and would not eat. Carrie emailed and called the breeder but did not get a reply. She took the puppy to a veterinarian, who diagnosed it with parvo and told Carrie the puppy needed intravenous rehydration and antibiotics. The initial vet bill was \$1,800. The puppy didn't survive the week. This is a typical occurrence when buying from a puppy mill or unvetted seller.

Puppy mills are commercial, high-volume dog breeding facilities that churn out puppies for profit. Mother dogs often spend their entire lives in cramped in cages with no personal attention, exercise or preventative veterinary care. These dogs are repeatedly bred and often suffer from serious health conditions. When they become too ill to breed, they are euthanized or left to die.

Common conditions in puppy mills include:

- Dogs are kept in filthy cages and are not properly socialized.
- Because of their living conditions, puppies often have health and behavior problems that are not immediately obvious but are difficult to overcome.
- Puppies bred in these conditions often have serious diseases such as parvo and distemper and will die even after getting veterinary care.
- Many unwitting buyers will pay what they believe is a bargain price for a puppy only to run up substantial veterinary bills and then suffer the heartbreak of watching their new puppy die.
- Puppies raised in unhygienic conditions are often very difficult to house train.
- Buying puppies from puppy mills perpetuates the cycle of animal abuse by encouraging breeders to put profit over the health of the animals.

California law prohibits pet stores from selling puppies from commercial breeders, so most puppy mill dogs are sold online, at flea markets and through classified ads. Many puppy mill breeders pose as responsible home breeders and use legitimate looking websites that mask the true conditions of their operations. The only way to ensure you are dealing with a legitimate breeder is to personally visit the premises. Responsible breeders are proud of their dogs and will happily show you their facilities and introduce you to their dam and sire dogs.

Tips on purchasing a puppy:

- Do not buy a puppy from a pet store, backyard breeder or Craigslist.
- Visit your local animal shelter to adopt a puppy.
- Find a puppy through the [Helen Woodward Animal Center](#), www.theshelterpetproject.org and www.adoptapet.com, North America's largest non-profit adoption websites.
- If you want a specific breed, find a reputable breeder through the American Kennel Club www.akc.org.
- Research prices for specific breeds. Beware of breeders offering puppies for below market price. They are usually puppy mills in disguise.
- Visit the breeder in person. Meet the parent dogs and view the breeders' premises.

The best way to break the cycle of animal abuse is to not buy from a puppy mill. If you were scammed with a sick puppy, report it to the San Diego Humane Society at investigations@sdhumane.org or by phone at 619-299-7012. You can also [file a report online](#) through the Humane Society's law enforcement page.

As your District Attorney, I'm committed to increasing communication and accessibility between the [DA's Office](#) and the public. I hope these consumer and public safety tips have been helpful.