

'Shooting' of Unwanted Dogs Raises Protest

SAPPORO (Kyodo) — Disposal of unwanted pet dogs by the town of Kitami, Hokkaido Prefecture, by injecting them with a lethal tranquilizer, has become the target of criticism from the public and from animal societies since the practice was reported in a nationwide newspaper Wednesday.

An inquiry into the matter was requested by the Prime Minister's office.

The report said that the town office often used guns to inject a lethal tranquilizer into unwanted dogs, including puppies, discarded in cages set up for that purpose, without making any attempt to find homes for the animals.

Since 1968 the town office has maintained two metal covered cages 75 cm high, 90 cm wide and 70 cm deep, for citizens to abandon their dogs in. The cages are located at the town office.

The cages have been dubbed "wan-wan cages." According to Yukio Masuda, environmental

sanitation section chief at the town office, 473 dogs were discarded there during 1985.

He explained to The Japan Times that the cages are for unwanted dogs, which may become dangerous to people if left at large.

Most of the dogs placed in the cages were newly born puppies or dogs left behind by families moving away from town and unable to take their pets with them, he said.

"It is our practice to transfer the dogs from the cages to another facility for around four days while dogs suitable for adoption and those with collars and registration numbers are screened. The rest are put to sleep.

"Only when dogs left in the cages are vicious do we dispose of them while they are still in there," Masuda said.

The town office has received over 30 calls from people around the country who are in opposition to the town policy, he said.

"Some people have pointed out that we should educate dog owners to not discard their pets, something we already do, Masuda explained.

The town office is currently discussing relocation of the cages, to keep them out of sight of the public, according to Masuda. But, he also indicated that there will be no change in their treatment of savage dogs.

Meanwhile, Isamu Kuze, an official in charge of animal protection at the Prime Minister's Office, said that he was astonished at the report of "this unprecedented treatment of animals."

"If the details given in the report are true, their method is not appropriate, especially if the cages are in the public view," he said. It will be necessary to demand a change if inquiries conducted by the Hokkaido government prove the report to be true, he added.

Chizuko Yamaguchi, of the Japan Animal Welfare Society,

Hokkaido that the newspaper report is true."

She also said that people with pets should not abandon them like stuffed animals when they get tired of them.

