

EST JAPAN

Photo show to depict lab animals' plight

Kobe activists seek to raise awareness of the dark side of product-testing

By CAMERON HAY
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KOBE — A group here will hold a photo exhibition later this month in an effort to raise awareness of the plight of animals that are victims of research experiments.

Although animal rights activists in Britain and America have sometimes provoked outrage with their tactics, their Japanese counterparts have chosen a more low-key approach to the issue.

"Resorting to things like bombing is inappropriate no matter what the circumstances, but in any case, the issue is so undeveloped here that our first step must be to simply make people aware of the problem," said Kako Miyamoto, spokesman for Amnesty Nojigiku Group, one of the organizers of the photo show.

The other sponsor is the Kobe branch of the Japan Anti-Vivisection Association, which formed last June. The exhibition will be its second event.

"The photos are fairly graphic," said Noriko Komai, a spokeswoman for the association. "And some people have cried when they saw them, but they seem to be the best way to let people know the truth of the situation."

The exhibition is particularly targeted toward people who treat their pets as "disposable" — enjoying the company of their puppy or kitten, and then abandoning it once it grows too big.

The association estimates that more than 90 percent of the dogs and cats used in laboratory experiments are



VICTIMIZED ANIMALS are pictured in some of the photos activists Kako Miyamoto and Noriko Komai plan to display later this month in Kobe. KIMIO IDA PHOTO

abandoned pets.

After being picked up by the pound, or "tender care center" as they are known in Japan, the animals are usually kept for six days before being destroyed or sold to laboratories for about ¥800 each.

Apart from targeting pet owners and local govern-

ments, which run the pounds, the group hopes to force laboratories to make public details of their research involving animals.

Although overseas activists have successfully organized consumer boycotts of products that depend on animal testing for development, Mi-

yamoto does not believe this to be a realistic strategy in Japan as yet.

"If you contact, for example, a cosmetic company overseas about whether they experiment on animals, they may try to skirt the issue, whereas a Japanese company will proudly tell you that they do use animals," said Miyamoto.

"This is because consumers here are still only concerned with product safety. In this environment, we must work to raise awareness."

A spokesman for Kanebo Ltd., an Osaka based cosmetics company, said the Health and Welfare Ministry requires them to test certain products on animals.

Although there were no legal requirements regarding the treatment of animals in laboratories, most companies adopted their own standards, he said.

"We don't feel there is any particular demand from consumers to change our policies regarding experiments on animals. We think product safety is still most people's overriding concern," he said.

The photo exhibition will be comprised mainly of photos from the U.S., because laboratories in Japan rarely allow groups like the association access to their facilities, Miyamoto said.

The pictures, 30 photos and 20 original prints, depict the suffering of animals used in experiments.

The exhibition will be held from Feb. 20 to Feb. 25 at Nankingmachi Gallery "Choya" in Chuo Ward, Kobe.