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the xmas presents nobody wants



Can you even imagine the kind of person who would tie a tiny puppy in a plastic bag and dump it on the side of the road to die? Nor can we...

The best cat I ever owned was given to me by friends who found her floating in a plastic bag in a river. Yes, it's heart breaking - but it's not an isolated incident. In the last year alone the RSPCA received a whopping total of 132,964 unwanted animals - mostly dogs and cats, but also rabbits, horses, goats, sheep and guinea pigs. While some are fostered out or sold to new owners, sadly, many have to be put down. Here's what RSPCA Media Officer Niamh Kemmy has to say about why pets are being ditched.

RSPCA STATS 2002-2003

Dogs received: 64,593
Reclaimed by owners: 14,788
Given new homes: 21,469
Put down: 24,554

Cats Received: 51,702
Reclaimed by owners: 1,051
Given new homes: 16,939
Put down: 30,449

How are pets dumped at the RSPCA?

"People bring pets they don't want into the RSPCA and surrender them. We've always got more dogs and cats than homes available, so we'd prefer it if they could try to find another home for the pet first, like through friends and family, but if they can't, then bringing it to the RSPCA is better than dumping it.

"We also get people coming in with animals they've found dumped in places like the side of the road. Someone once came into the shelter with a dog in a plastic bag and threw it across the counter saying, 'I found it', and then just walked out again. People also dump litters of puppies outside the shelter; even though it's cruel, it's still better than chucking them in the river.

"After we receive an animal, we desex it so the animal can't breed and have unwanted litters, then try to find it a new home."

Why do people dump pets?

"The most common reason is behavioural problems. People dump them because they bark a lot or their living circumstances change, like if they have to move into a flat. People will dump them if they're going on a holiday, or they're bored of it, or for trivial things, like because it peed on the kitchen floor."

What's the most common pet that's dumped?

"Dogs, by far. They're almost always mixed breeds, and we get a lot of older dogs that people simply don't want. Some people dump them when they grow up and aren't cute any more. People buy animals like an

Alaskan husky because they are cute puppies, but they aren't prepared to take on the responsibility of training them. The dogs grow up to be big dogs and get out of control, then the owners bring them in and dump them."

What happens to the dogs who don't find a new home?

"They get put down. Older ones, big ones and vicious ones are put down straight away as you can't re-home them. What's sad is that it's never the dog's fault that it's ended up vicious and dangerous. I once saw a man surrender a big Old English sheepdog that was trying to bite anyone it could. Its coat was just full of dirt and it had obviously been neglected. The dog was so dangerous it had to be put down, and it was sad because it wasn't the dog's fault it had ended up that way."

What can I do about it?

Volunteer at a pound or RSPCA to help walk and groom the dogs. Why not hold a fundraising event to raise money? Put on a trivia night, ask local businesses to donate prizes and get contestants to pay an entrance fee, or bake up a storm and donate the money you make. You can also become a member of the RSPCA, or take part in the RSPCA's fundraiser, The Million Paws Walk, on May 16, 2004 (www.millionpawswalk.com.au).

How to stop your pet becoming a victim

- Get your dog or cat microchipped, registered and make sure it wears a tag with its name and your name and contact details on it.
- Don't get a pet unless you're committed to looking after it for life. Remember, dogs and cats can live for up to 15 years. Consider the breed of dog carefully; don't get a big dog if you don't have a lot of time to spend looking after it and walking it.
- Train your dog. Take it to obedience school to get basic training so it's less likely to grow to be unmanageable.
- If you're after a dog or a cat, get it from a pound. They have heaps of healthy and cute dogs and cats that are desperate for a little love and a good home.



Start with www.rspca.org.au and www.doggierescue.com.au. www.pawsandclaws.org.au has links to animal welfare organisations in every state.

WORDS CHRISTINE KNIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY CARE OF THE RSPCA