

Puppy Mills Lassoed in Texas

The SPCA of Texas takes down a mass-breeding facility—and takes in hundreds of dogs

BY KATHLEEN SUMMERS

Trespassers will be shot. Survivors will be shot again.

The sign at the entrance of an isolated property near Gladewater, Texas, let passersby know they weren't welcome.

Beyond the gate, shielded from public view by property rights and privacy laws, almost 250 dogs and puppies lived and died in deplorable conditions. Until a citizen happened to visit the property for an unrelated purpose—and then called police to report what he'd seen—no one knew the extent of the dogs' neglect.

It was a Monday in late September when officials at the Upshur County Sheriff's Office notified the SPCA of Texas in Dallas that they needed help removing hundreds of dogs from a suspected puppy mill. Shelter staff had little time to prepare. On Tuesday, they visited the property to assess the situation and count the dogs; by the next morning, the sheriff's office had obtained a seizure warrant.

SPCA employees mobilized for the rescue. Workers found dogs of many breeds, including Yorkshire terriers, poodles, chihuahuas, and schnauzers in crates, pens, and cages all over the property. Dogs in some of the outdoor pens had scrambled on top of their doghouses to escape the filth and fecal matter that

Puppy Mill Emancipation: The HSUS

has been busy with its own efforts to stop puppy mills. Its five-month undercover investigation revealed a significant puppy mill industry in **Virginia** and led to what may be the largest puppy mill bust in history. Another investigation traced the origin of the animals sold at **Pets of Bel Air**—the ritzy California shop where Britney Spears and Paris Hilton have gotten pets—to puppy mills. Visit humanesociety.org/pupmills to learn more and find out how you can take action.



Chihuahuas huddle on an ash pit on the heavily littered property. "Dogs were spread out everywhere," says Maura Davies, the SPCA's director of communications. SPCA OF TEXAS

surrounded them, says Maura Davies, the SPCA's director of communications. Others were sweltering in tiny crates inside a roach-infested trailer. Many dogs suffered from mange, malnutrition, and infections, and some were near death.

The owner was jailed pending a psychiatric assessment, and the following week, a civil court gave the SPCA of Texas legal custody of the 247 dogs it had removed.

Room for a Few Hundred More?

Every dog has his day, the saying goes—and for these long-neglected pooches, that lucky day had finally arrived. But it presented a challenge for the shelter. Already busy, the SPCA suddenly had to find room for 247 new arrivals. In fact, the organization was still wrapping up a case in which it had taken in over 100 dogs confiscated from a puppy mill in another county—for a total of 353 animals from both seizures.

For more information on how shelters address **puppy mill** cases, see "How Much is That Doggie in the Window Suffering?" in the Sept-Oct 2006 issue of *Animal Sheltering* at animalsheltering.org.

Fortunately, says SPCA of Texas president James Bias, the organization's past experience with natural disasters and with other Texas-sized rescues had given the shelter ample practice.

One of the organization's two facilities is surrounded by extra acreage. When a large number of animals needs shelter, the SPCA puts up modular kennels made of fencing panels, and, if necessary, sets up large tents that turn any open space into an emergency sheltering facility. Industrial-sized fans and heaters are on hand if weather creates a need. The separate emergency shelter has the added benefit of keeping the new population of animals—who have a high probability of disease—from being housed side-by-side with the rest of the shelter population, Bias says.

Even while they were setting up the extra space, SPCA staff sent out alerts by phone and e-mail to their database of more than 600 trained and screened