

California canine blood bank disputes PETA abuse claims

By AMY TAXIN October 12, 2018



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GARDEN GROVE, Calif. (AP) — The animal rights group PETA alleges dogs at one of the nation’s largest canine blood banks are mistreated, but the non-profit that runs the Southern California facility says the retired racing greyhounds are well-cared for and save other dogs’ lives.

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People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals sent complaints this week to California and local authorities alleging the 200 greyhounds kept at Hemopet don’t receive proper care and are cooped up nearly all day in pens too small for their size. The group contends confining dogs in a facility to draw their blood is wrong and says they should be placed in homes and only donate blood if their owners opt to bring them in.



Hemopet, which has operated for decades, said the dogs are well-cared for and get regular walks and outdoor play time at its 1.5 acre Orange County campus. The organization said the greyhounds participate in a state-regulated canine blood donor program for about 10 months before they are placed in well-screened adoptive homes.

Veterinary experts said there is a demand for canine blood to treat ill pets and those in need of emergency surgery. How to meet this need, however, is subject to debate.

“Community” blood banks rely on walk-in pet donors while “closed” banks such as Hemopet require dogs to live on-site while giving blood. The controlled setting ensures blood is free of diseases.

California requires the closed model be used for commercial canine blood banks, said Hemopet’s president Dr. Jean Dodds. She said she believes pets living in people’s homes would need to be retested for disease before each blood donation to provide a comparable level of safety, and even then it might not be possible to safeguard the supply.

Hemopet supplies about 40 percent of the commercial blood bank products sold in the United States and is one of two such authorized facilities in California, Dodds said.

Dodds said the greyhounds would be killed if they weren’t rescued from the racing industry. Hemopet provides medical care and spays and neuters the dogs and screens them to assess whether they are suitable donors. Greyhounds often have a “universal” blood type, she said, meaning it can be used for any canine transfusion.

“There’s some people who just think doing anything with animals are bad,” she said. “What if your own animal needed a blood transfusion? What would you do?”

In a letter to California’s Department of Food and Agriculture, PETA alleged that dogs’ tails, paws and nails are injured in small cages where they’re kept 23 hours a day, and blood is drawn at times from animals suspected of illness. PETA — which has called for an end to greyhound racing — said its allegations were based on reports from an undisclosed eyewitness.

“She doesn’t put them up for adoption until she is done bleeding them and that is outrageous,” said Lisa Lang, PETA’s senior vice president, referring to Dodds. “They are living, breathing dogs who deserve to live in loving homes like any other.”

PETA provided photos and video showing the dogs in cages and wearing muzzles. The group said they obtained the footage from the witness.

Upon a request for an interview, Hemopet immediately agreed to allow an Associated Press reporter to tour its facility in Garden Grove. Some dogs were kept in crates and cages while others were housed in longer pens in pairs. Most had blankets and toys and took turns in larger cement yards for recreation. They had a sandy strip for running and a grassy area where volunteer visitors walked them. One dog had a neck bandage from where blood had been drawn. None of the dogs seen by an AP reporter showed any visible signs of distress.

Manager Karen Stalk said dogs in crates are walked five times a day by staff and more by visitors.

Jay Van Rein, a spokesman for California's Department of Food and Agriculture, said the complaint was received and the agency will investigate. He said the facility is inspected by the state every year.

Jim Gartland, executive director of the National Greyhound Association, said his organization can bar members from sending dogs to facilities that don't meet its standards, which occurred in a case in Texas, but so far they have heard only positive things about Hemopet.

He said they have no problem with sending greyhounds to blood banks so long as they are treated properly and adopted out to homes after their service.

Veterinarians consulted by PETA, however, called the conditions "unacceptable" and "cruel."

Dr. Sean Owens, medical director of University of California, Davis' veterinary blood bank, said controlled settings such as Hemopet allow for clean blood but modern veterinary science has progressed so that it can be obtained from "community" banks.

"There is enough evidence out there, both in the human and veterinary literature, to suggest it can be done very safely in an open colony," he said.