

10 Questions About Puppy Mills Answered

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Since we kicked off the ResQwalk Against Puppy Mills, in Memory of Harley, we've received a lot of questions about puppy mills. To answer them, we brought in the experts from National Mill Dog Rescue. Here are some common questions answered.



What is a puppy mill?

A puppy mill is a large scale commercial dog breeding operation where dogs live in cages and are producing puppies to be sold in pet stores across the country – and online throughout the world. There can be as few as 100 breeding dogs or as many as 800 breeding dogs housed at a single facility. It is estimated that there are approximately 10,000 puppy mills in the USA, the majority being located in the Midwest. About one percent are approved and licensed by the USDA, as dogs are legally classified as 'agriculture'. Read more here: [Puppy Mills](#)

Are puppy mills legal and why?

The fact is, commercial dog breeding is considered legal business in the United States and has been for decades. The current legal standards for care, housing and treatment in licensed commercial breeding kennels are set by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which was signed into law in 1966. Although there have been amendments to the AWA, the standards remain very low. Read more here: [Puppy Mills](#)

the years and individual states may implement further regulations, the provisions remain providing basic, humane care for breeding dogs. Despite that, we know this to be true, we have no aspect of the industry.

The federal Animal Welfare Act requires breeders who have more than three breeding female dogs pet stores or puppy brokers to be licensed and inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Under the federal law, some states have laws that regulate the commercial breeding industry as well. However, the standards that breeders are required to meet by law are extremely minimal. Under the federal law, it is completely legal to keep a dog in a cage only six inches longer than the dog in each direction, stacked on top of another cage, for the dog's entire life. Conditions that most people would consider cruel, are often totally legal.

How are dogs in puppy mills treated?

Puppy mills usually house dogs in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, without adequate ventilation, water and socialization. Puppy mill dogs do not get to experience treats, toys, exercise or basic grooming. Waste cleanup, dogs are often kept in cages with wire flooring that injures their paws and legs—and cages to be stacked up in columns. Breeding dogs at mills might spend their entire lives outdoors in harsh elements, or crammed inside filthy structures where they never get the chance to feel the sun or breathe fresh air.

How did puppy mills begin?

Puppy mills became more prevalent after World War II. In response to widespread crop failures in the United States, the United States Department of Agriculture began promoting purebred puppies as a fool-proof "cash" crop. Many chicken coops and rabbit hutches were re-purposed for dogs, and the retail pet industry; pet stores large and small began to receive an increasing supply of puppies from the new "mills."

What breeds of dogs come from puppy mills?

Nearly all popular breeds of dogs are produced in puppy mills. It's not unusual for a mill to have many different breeds; including 'designer breeds'. Small and medium size dogs are easiest to manage and most commonly bred, but larger breeds such as English Bulldogs, German Shepherds and even Great Danes are bred in puppy mills as well.

How can I get a puppy mill shut down?

Keep in mind that the commercial breeding of dogs is a legal industry. If, however, you believe a mill is substandard and the welfare of the dogs is at stake, this is the list of agencies you can contact:

- Call the Humane Society of the United States Tip Line 1-877-Mill-Tip
- State Department of Agriculture
- Local Humane Society or Animal Welfare Officials
- Local Sheriff's Department

- American Kennel Club (AKC)
- County Department of Health
- State Department of Environmental Protection (EPA)
- State Department of Natural Resources
- Zoning Commission
- Attorney General's Office
- USDA, if the mill is licensed by USDA you can complete this complaint form.

What happens to the puppies in pet stores if they are sold?

This usually depends on the store. Some stores say that they return the puppies to the breeders, keep discounting them until they do sell, and some say that they will find a local shelter to take them. Pet stores will often shuffle the puppies from one location to another, where there may be a better market. You really have to think of this as a longer-term issue which is really hard when you're looking at that cute puppy in a pet store and feel like you might need to 'save' it. That's the explanation a lot of people give and the end result is that you have to just not shop in a store that sells puppies. Don't even walk in the door!

Information regarding pet stores that sell puppies can be found [here](#).

I heard that the AKC supports puppy mills, is that true?

The AKC registry is a service provided by the American Kennel Club. While many people believe that AKC-registered puppies came from reputable breeders, being AKC-registered means nothing more than you and the puppy both had AKC papers. While there are some AKC standards, they do not restrict puppy mills from registering dogs. The fact is, many AKC-registered dogs are born in puppy mills. To learn more about the AKC's relationship with puppy mills please [click here](#).

What is the difference between a puppy mill and a responsible breeder?

Puppy mills exist for only one purpose - to make money. In a puppy mill, there may be as many as 100 and up to 800 or more breeding dogs. Every female is pregnant with every heat, including their 10-12 months old when they themselves are still a puppy. The puppies receive little to no medical attention, are almost always taken from their mothers too young, and often start their lives out in cages, scared. There is absolutely no regard to the health and well-being of the breeding dogs and when they produce puppies, the majority of them are killed.

Most often, a reputable breeder has great interest in one or perhaps two breeds. The purpose of their breeding program is to continually strive to bring their bloodlines closest to the breed standard. A reputable breeder spends a great deal of time, effort and money showing their dogs, socializing their dogs, having their breed

genetic defects, and being very careful to place their puppies in permanent, loving homes. A reputable breeder should be able to tell you any time for any reason, take any of the puppies they've bred back into their care for the lifetime of responsibility for the dogs that they have produced.

A reputable breeder wants to know about you and develop a relationship with you. They will show you photographs of their puppies as they grow and are always available to help with any questions or concerns about the puppies. One of the most important things to know is that a reputable breeder has nothing to hide. They will let you meet the parents of the puppies and see the environment the puppies are raised in. Visit the breeder's home, meet the parents of the puppies, inspect the environment the puppies were raised in, ask lots of questions and if it feels like something is off, they probably are and you'd be best served to move on.

How do I contact my lawmakers?

Putting an end to puppy mills starts with YOU! Starting at the most local level of government, you can spread this message and raise awareness with those who have the power to create laws. Here's how:

First and foremost, contact the members of your State Legislature. Tell them how you feel about puppy mills and provide them links to puppy mill information and photos, and share Harley's website: <http://www.harleypupmilldog.com>

Write to your State Governor

Contact your United States Senators and House Representatives

Write to President Obama

Contact your Mayors – City Council Members – County Executives – Other Local Officials

If you have any additional questions, please post them in the comments!

By Bailey Schroeder, ResQwalk Founder

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