

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the Positive Side: Gas chamber ban a step forward for animals

By Frank Bryce

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Humane animal treatment in New Mexico took another step forward with a news release from Gov. Bill Richardson's office dated May 12, clarifying that use of CO gas chambers to euthanize animals is banned as of June 19.

The release reads: "I realize there has been some confusion about the effective date for the new law banning the use of gas chambers for euthanizing animals" Richardson said. "Let me be clear: that date is June 19, 2009. That is the clear intent of the bills I signed into law, and it is the desire of the people of New Mexico."

Richardson said he is sensitive to the fact that the five communities that still use gas chambers need time to transition to the use of lethal injection of animals. However, the governor included \$100,000 in the state budget to help with that transition, which can be used to contract for lethal injection services while employees are trained.

Recent media reports cite some ambiguity regarding the interaction of the two bills that Richardson signed into law, both of which relate to the use of lethal injection as the most humane method of animal euthanasia.

One bill, HB 265, bans use of the gas chamber to euthanize animals effective June 19. The other, HB 593, allows up to 180 days after the effective date of the law for veterinary technicians to become certified by the Federal Drug Administration to acquire and administer the drugs necessary to carry out lethal injection.

Richardson emphasized that the gas chamber ban goes into effect on June 19. Although veterinary technicians have until Dec. 31 to become FDA-certified to perform lethal injections, the ban will still be in effect. During that time period, communities can contract for lethal inject services.

"I want to thank Majority Leader Ken Martinez, the Animal Sheltering Board and animal protection groups who worked together on these bills and continue to advocate for the humane treatment of animals," Richardson said.

This release highlights another in many improvements to animal welfare laws for our state and while these laws mandating humane animal euthanasia which is a positive step forward and should be applauded, every community in New Mexico needs to continue to work to reduce pet over-population and the reduction of euthanasia of healthy, adoptable but unwanted animals in their shelters. Communities need to work collaboratively to bring spay and neuter programs, identification and return to owner efforts, develop positive relationships with animal rescue organizations, create multiple off-site adoption events, and alternative shelter facilities. On the positive side, those efforts appear to be growing.

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