Unwanted animals: Some are gassed, some are injected

Facing the cold reality of death

It's cold on the stainless-steel table, but Leslie Wood puts her arm around the old Beagle and hugs her while she prepares the lethal injection. Richard Edwards holds the dog still. In tall ways, and it turns and brown eyes upward to Wood.

Wood speaks softly as she rubs alcohol on a leg. "You're a good old girl. You're a sweet thing." Then gently pushes the needle into the leg. The dog goes limp. Its eyes are fixed, dilated. It is dead.

Next to be euthanized is a 9-year-old dachshund.

"Hey, darling... Hey, old thing..." Wood says and gently wipes the dog's eye. She removes the leash and scratches the dog's chin. The dog responds gratefully to the attention.

"You're a good old girl. You sure are. It's all right," Wood says as she injects the solution.

A faint whimper, then the dog relaxes and lies on the table.

The observer feels the numbness of uncertainty creeping in. But, unfortunately, this is cold reality.

The old ones and the sick ones are euthanized individually by injection.

"The ones we're fixing to do, their only crime was being born," Wood says.

Dogs are led down that long, lonely hall from the kennel area to the gas chambers. Frantic barking of all pitches can be heard in the kennel. There's the smell of disinfectant throughout the facility.

Two or three dogs can be gassed together. They resist as they are led down the hall. Do they know? Some of the employees believe they do sense death.

The dogs are pushed into one of the two chambers where gas will be released to kill them. They scramble and bark; one whimper in fear. Their frantic pawing at the glass door causes as the gas enters them. They go limp, then jump convulsively, already dead.

Two employees carry a wire cage to the cat room. One reads from a list.

"The two in No. 25. The calico in No. 26."

They grab two gray tabbies and the calico and drop them into the cage. They add a black and tan Siamese, a friendly tortoiseshell, a large gray-and-white male, a yellow-and-white that the owner said was very good with children, seven yawning, frightened cats that nobody wanted squirm and stretch their paws out as the employees carry the cage down the hall. A one-way trip.

The cage is set in the second gas chamber. The door is closed. A button is pushed. As the carbon monoxide begins to affect them, they snore and fight to get out. The gray-and-white cat looks straight at an observer and reaches out a paw in supplication. And then he, too, is brain dead.

For another five minutes the feline bodies jerk and twist. It takes that long for the respiratory system to shut down.

When it's all over, the bodies are removed from the chambers and dumped in a large truck. From there, at the end of the day (or when the truck is full) they are taken to Devil's Swamp, dumped and buried with a bulldozer.

It's a daily one-way trip for unwanted pets. It's the end of the line.