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Kate Turlington, Investigations Liaison
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
501 Front Street
Norfolk, VA 23510

Dear Ms. Turlington:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on 2005 video footage of dogs reportedly being kept in a research facility at a major university in the United States. My comments follow below. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Jonathan Balcombe's comments on PETA video footage of caged dogs

I am an ethologist—a biologist trained in animal behavior. I have no professional experience with dogs. My experience with dogs is from numerous casual interactions with them over the years, readings of texts and articles on dog behavior, and consultations with experts. Because dogs are highly social and physically expressive, their emotional states tend to be more readily interpreted than in most other animals.

This short video depicts two rows of cells divided by a corridor, each cell separated from the next by wire fencing, in an apparently windowless facility. Each cell appears to be about 5x10 feet floor area, with high ceiling. Most cells have shredded paper or sawdust floor litter. The facility looks clean and the dogs appear physically healthy and well-fed.

The behavior of the dogs in these scenes is intensely energetic. The impression is that they are very excited and agitated by the presence of the humans. They behave as though starved for attention and chronically deprived of exercise (which is supported by the one comment at the beginning of the video, in which a technician remarks that he doesn't really have time to take them out for walks).

Some of the dogs' movements might be interpreted as expressions of excitement. Most have the hallmarks of stereotypies—repetitive, functionless movements that result typically from the frustration of highly motivated behaviors, and which are commonly believed to reflect suffering (Mason 1991). Among these are rapid and repeated running in circles in the cell, rapid back-and-forth pacing at the front of the cell (also pronounced in one of two dogs filmed in an office in a carrying crate), repeated rearing and/or jumping, and spinning in one place (seen in at least two dogs in the very last sequence, 10/20/05). The dogs' barks sound hoarse, which, assuming this is not an artifact of the sound recording equipment, suggests excessive barking has been going on.

The brevity of the clips hampers interpretation of these sequences. Most clips are in the 10-20 second range; stereotypies can go on for minutes to hours, and it would be illuminating to witness the duration of these bouts. It would also be helpful to see the animals' behavior without human presence, though I appreciate the logistical challenge under the circumstances. I wonder if the observed behavior is occurring only while the people are in the corridor, or if it goes on much of the time.

Some dogs are pair-housed. Most are in solitary confinement. This is a harsh penalty for a highly social animal, and all the more so if they are rarely or never taken out for exercise and play. The span of dates displayed on the videotape is seven months (3/18/05 to 10/20/05). One cannot tell how long any single dog is in this environment, but the severity of the stereotypies suggests that it is prolonged.

My overall assessment is that this video depicts dogs whose nutritional and veterinary requirements are probably being met, but whose social and behavioral needs are chronically neglected. If these animals were being kept temporarily at a shelter, were available for adoption, and were regularly being exercised, then I could accept that; though they surely would not be showing the behaviors they show here. That they are reportedly being used in research which is not done in their individual interests, and that they are suffering from chronic neglect, I find entirely unacceptable. The 1985 amendments to the Animal Welfare Act require regular exercise for dogs in research; the conditions depicted here appear to be in violation of that law.

References

Mason GJ. 1991a. Stereotypies and suffering. *Behavioural Processes* 25: 103-115.

Sincerely,



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