



## Puppy Mills

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When you say “puppy mill”, most pet lovers can conjure up an image of puppies and dogs being kept in despicable conditions. I’m not going to subject you to the horrible images, if you have not seen them already, look up puppy mills on the internet. Unfortunately, even with all of the media attention given to this problem, some people have still not heard the message. What about kitty mills? Ever heard the media talk about this? I haven’t! Actually, any animal that can be kept as a pet can be “milled”. Cats, ferrets, hamsters etc..



Above is a picture from the Humane Society - a kitty mill in Minnesota

Why do puppy mills get more attention than other kinds of mills? It could be that there are more of them or many people relate to dogs better than other kinds of pets. It doesn't matter what the species, cruelty is cruelty, neglect is neglect.



Kittens that are advertised as “free kitten” are generally the by-product of irresponsible cat owners not spaying or neutering their cats. Cats that are bought however, are at just a great a risk of being from a kitty mill than a puppy being from a puppy mill. But what about all the other pets you can buy? Some of the big box stores speak out publicly about mills and won't “sell” puppies or kittens, but they certainly sell ferrets, hamsters, guinea pigs, snakes, birds..... Where do these pets come from? They get shipments in their stores every week of new ones to sell. Think about guinea pigs – how many pet stores sell them in your state? In the U.S.? How many are at each store? How many do they get in each week? How many die? How many are sold? Who supplies these? Birds are another problem all together – this business relies greatly on illegal trapping and importing birds from their natural habitat because birds are much harder to breed in captivity.

Ok, now that I may have gotten you to think about mills in general, let's talk about puppy mills specifically. As the media attacks puppy mills, they keep getting sneakier about how they get their puppies sold. They haven't stopped breeding puppies, it is still big business – lots of money. They just sell them in more creative ways.

First, a pet store that sells puppies might tell you that their puppies are from USDA licensed breeders (puppy mills) or local breeders (puppy mills). They may tell you that they are AKC registered (puppy mill dogs are AKC registered) – never, ever buy a puppy or kitten from a pet store. Check the [ASPCA data base of stores that sell puppy mill puppies](#) – this lists places in your area that sell puppy mill puppies.

Another place to avoid is Craigslist. Puppy mill owners are slowly being forced to be more creative. Many will put ads in all different cities for puppies, never buy a puppy from Craigslist. The ad says a small re-homing fee – red flag! Sure there are some legitimate people trying to re-home their pet on Craigslist asking for a re-homing fee, but I guarantee that if they are “re-homing” a puppy it is for a reason – behavioral or health being the top two reasons. “Free to good home” is most likely not a puppy mill, but definitely will have behavior or health problems that will end up costing allot. There is no such thing as a free dog/cat/pet!

Websites that claim to be breeders – don't be fooled by a fancy looking website. No reputable breeder will sell to someone they have not met, interviewed, required an application and contract where you agree to spay/neuter the puppy and to return it to the breeder if you can't keep it for ANY reason. Most reputable breeders will not ship their puppies to buyers. Getting a puppy shipped to you is never a good idea – young pups can be traumatized during shipping and many have died during the trip.

Never meet a seller/breeder/individual halfway or in a parking lot. If the seller does not invite you to visit their home (not facility) to meet the puppies and the parent(s) and to meet you and match a puppy to your family, they are not a reputable breeder.

So, where do you safely get a puppy that is not from a puppy mill? Here is my suggestion in order of my preference:

1. Individual or smaller rescue organization (some of these set up in the bigger box stores on the weekends). There are many pure-bred dogs available from rescues. The reason I prefer this over large shelters is most of the time many or all of the dogs/cats in their care are kept in foster homes with much less stress than being in a shelter environment.
2. Large animal shelters
3. Your veterinarian – vets sometimes have pets that need a home.
4. Local reputable breeder

How do you know a breeder is reputable?

You have to fill out an application

You have to sign a contract for return and spay/neuter

They may do a home visit to make sure they are comfortable with you

They invite you to meet the parents

They let you see the litter through their development

They crate train and start potty training their puppies

They don't let the puppy go until a minimum of 8 weeks (10 weeks for tiny breeds)

They do not ship or meet you half way to deliver the puppy

They only have 2-3 breeding pairs of dogs

They only have one breed of dog - occasionally 2 but never more than 2 different breeds

They have medical certificates for their breeding pairs (eyes, hips or any other genetic issue that specific breed is at high risk for)

They don't breed a dog younger than 2 years of age and a maximum of once a year

They usually have a waiting list – if they have puppies available all year long that is a red flag!

They require you to get a health check within 7 days and provide you with a health record including de-worming and first vaccines given. Vaccines should not be given prior to 6 weeks of age to be of any benefit.

Whether you adopt from a shelter or decide to buy from a breeder, hiring a trainer to help with pre-adoption counseling to help pick the right breed and/or personality for your family is perhaps the best thing you can do before bringing puppy home. Many trainers do this at no cost or low cost especially if you sign up for a training package for the new little furry family member.

The only way puppy mills will disappear is if they stop making money. Please be a responsible puppy adopter/buyer and share this information with everyone you know.