



Clerical errors, computer mishaps killing animals at Miami-Dade Animal Services

Dogs, cats, killed despite adoption commitments from rescue groups

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MIAMI -

“They killed her,” read the note attached to the Facebook photo on which I had been tagged.

Less than 18 hours earlier, I had read a message that [Sue](#), Miami-Dade Animal Services ID#A1453340, had a hold on her and was safe.

In animal rescue lingo, that means someone had made the commitment to pick her up and transport her to a new family, a foster home or a 'no-kill' facility.

But Miami-Dade Animal Services killed Sue before someone could pick her up.

This is not an isolated case. In the past 8 weeks alone, I have received information about five such cases. In all of them, MDAS blames either human error or a computer mishap for killing the animals.

At 10:12 p.m. on Thursday Aug. 9, Nancy Tucker sent a DNE (Do Not Euthanize) e-mail to MDAS confirming that an adoption plan for Sue had been put in place.

"To be picked up 8/10/12 by Julie Kemman. Thank you very much!!!!!" she wrote.

At 7:00 a.m. on Friday, the staff at Miami-Dade Animal Services began the daily ritual of putting down the animals scheduled to die that day. At 7:45 a.m., Sue was euthanized.

At 10 a.m., the staff finally got around to reading Nancy's e-mail from the night before.

Debi Day, an animal advocate who has been working to help MDAS with its no-kill initiative, says they made sure there are computers in the "kill room," where technicians can check on late-night e-mails that come in from rescues.

Why, if systems are in place to double check to see if there's a hold on an animal, did this happen?

“Obviously someone was too lazy to check,” Nancy says.

Dogs aren't the only ones falling victim to these errors and oversights. Cats that come in to the shelter are put down at [an alarming rate](#), mostly due to lack of space.

On Aug. 6, I received a Facebook message from Nicole Silverstein regarding three cats with rescue holds that had been

killed at MDAS within the previous two weeks.

"Two of those cats -- [Annie](#) and [Champ](#) -- were on hold for me to adopt," Nicole said. "I am heartbroken."

On Aug. 3, A&B All Cats4ever Rescue received an e-mail from Joel Vera at the shelter confirming they had received a note saying that a rescue commitment had been placed for Annie and Champ for pickup on Aug. 6 between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.

However, on Aug. 5, MDAS killed both cats.

"Sorry, Yes, but they were Euth," was the response from Andrew Banchs, another employee.

In this case, MDAS blamed a combination of a clerical error and a mysterious illness for killing the cats.

"The hold had not been placed in the records," said Kathy Labrada, the shelter's Chief of Operations & Enforcement. "The only information recorded was a DNE which expired at noon on Aug. 5. The cats had been here since 7/17, both of them became sick and were euthanized to protect the health of the general population."

"We definitely see that there are problems at the shelter that employees are not following the proper procedures," wrote Britt Camacho from A&B All Cats4ever Rescue. "How very sad that cats are being killed because of this. We have the proof in the e-mail from Mr. Vera that we had the hold until Aug. 6. What is most upsetting is that you say that they became sick. They don't become sick in one night. Someone could have at least called us to let us know so we could have picked them up immediately. No excuse and definitely not acceptable."

An e-mail I sent to Alex Munoz regarding this situation went unanswered for two days. I received a response from Kathy Labrada, blaming a clerical error for what happened.

A week earlier, [Kali](#), another cat with a rescue commitment, had also been put down.

"I cannot and will not offer an excuse for this matter. I am as disappointed as you are that she had a home she never made it into as a result. The technician responsible will be held accountable and all other technicians will be counseled immediately on the importance of checking all notes prior to euthanasia," Labrada wrote in response to an e-mail.

On Aug. 14, A&B All Cats4ever Rescue sent MDAS a do not euthanize e-mail at 5:25 a.m. saying that they were working with a person who wanted to adopt [Gracie](#), yet another cat.

At 10:24 a.m. came the response from MDAS - "GRACIE (A1452610)- euth."

"The DNE was sent at 5.25 a.m. and the she was killed around 8.30 a.m. because the tech does not check computer e-mails or anything before killing," said Britt Camacho of A&B All Cats4ever Rescue. "It is another failed procedure at the shelter and because everything is so unorganized and procedures are not being followed. Animals are being killed, even when they have a home.

"We can look at changing the protocols again to improve which I am always in favor of," Munoz wrote in response. "In this case the poor kitty was euthanized before 8:22 a.m. Her hold had expired the days before. The new hold was requested at 5:22 a.m. on the same day that euthanasia starts, 15 days after her arrival. Email helps to save cats and dogs but in this daily struggle to find homes for the thousands of abandoned animals, it is not the perfect solution.

Agreed, Mr. Munoz, it's not perfect, but it is a solution that could work if your employees would check the e-mails that came in overnight before the ritual killing begins for the day.

Finally, there's Sugar, a stray boxer that someone who works for MDAS found and brought to the shelter on July 9.

Sugar was not killed at the shelter, but in many way MDAS is responsible for her death.

I found out about Sugar through Cecilia Mich, the Broward County Area Coordinator for Coastal Boxer Rescue, a rescue group that pulls sick dogs out of MDAS on a regular basis.

Her [intake photo](#) did not show how horribly emaciated she was and no one from MDAS called to let us know she needed medical help," Cecilia told me.

When a shelter receives an animal, it assigns a due out date that's at least 5 working days away to allow the animals

owner to claim him. Before that, no one is allowed to adopt or pull the animal. Sugar's due out date was July 15th.

Cecilia says she went to MDAS on the 13th to pull Cara, another boxer in need, and was told **Sugar had to be pulled right** away and get medical attention.

"She was in such bad shape that I didn't think she was even going to **survive the car ride** to Boca from Miami," Cecilia said.

"We're not ones to bash a shelter on their procedures. I know they're overwhelmed and doing their jobs, but at what point does someone – anyone -- at MDAS see that dog laying there ... not moving ... suffering ...and not call rescues to come get her?"

It's a question animal advocates are asking frequently, questioning the protocols the shelter follows even when an animal's life is clearly in danger.

"What disgusts us most is the fact they let a dog suffer for four days and still didn't want to release her to us before her due-out date," Cecilia said. "There is seriously something wrong with that. Sugar deserved better in life. It's just a shame she didn't get it.

After trying to save Sugar she died quietly about 36 hours after she was in CBR custody.

"Could she have lived if we got her sooner? I believe so," Cecilia says.

Right now as you read this, somewhere in the U.S., an animal is being killed at an animal shelter.

The shelter says they are "humanely euthanized." But let's be clear. There is nothing humane about killing a perfectly healthy animal.

MDAS is made up of human beings, exhausted human beings who have been the whipping posts of the animal advocacy community for a long time.

They are not the monsters that, in moments of pain and anger, animal activists accuse them of being.

They are human beings who get paid to do a job and they should be held accountable for their actions, no matter how exhausted or frustrated they may be.

Six cases of animals suffering needlessly and dying in less than two months is not an error or procedural mistake. It's a tumor of bureaucracy that needs to be removed before its cancer continues to spread.

Two years ago, Dr. Sara Pizano left MDAS and was replaced by her boss, Alex Munoz. At the time, many doubted Munoz's ability to rid the shelter of it's "killer" reputation. For starters, he was a county bureaucrat, not a veterinarian.

I, however, supported him, thinking a person with a background in management was just what the shelter needed to be run like a business.

Are things any better? In some ways, yes. But a lot of work still needs to be done.

MDAS must put into practice the things they have committed to doing, things as simple as double checking that there's no hold on an animal before killing it.

On July 6, Miami-Dade County announced the "adoption of landmark legislation, designating the Miami-Dade Animal Services Shelter as a 'no-kill' facility.

"I don't see how these actions are getting them any closer to a 'no kill. or 'catch, neuter/spay and release' shelter," Nicole said, referring to MDAS's 'no-kill' designation.

Rescue groups continue their battle to save the thousands of animals that pass through the doors of Miami-Dade Animal Services each year. But they can't do it alone.

What can you do to help?

For starters, MDAS is correct in their message that educating people about the importance of spaying and neutering

their pets is the best way to cut down on the number of unwanted animals in our community. I urge you to spread that message as often as you can.

Shelters and clinics throughout our community offer low-cost and free spay/neuter services. Take advantage of them and encourage all the pet owners in your life to do the same.

Secondly, encourage everyone you know to adopt from the shelter. There's no need to go to a breeder when hundreds of dogs – from mutt to purebred – are available at the shelter right now.

Finally, if you live in Miami-Dade County, vote in support of the Pets' Trust in November election. It's an initiative that could help funnel much needed monies to MDAS and help them reach their goal of becoming a 'no-kill' facility. To find out more, visit [Pets Trust Miami's website](#).

"Something needs to change," Cecilia says.

Indeed it does, Cecilia. Indeed it does.

To contact and help any of the organizations that contributed to this article, click on the links below:

A&B All Cats4ever Rescue

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/AB-All-Cats4ever-Rescue/334158193307484>

Coastal Boxer Rescue

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Coastal-Boxer-Rescue/152035641479590>

Undercats4life

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/#!/Undercats4Life>

E-mail: fixflorida@undercats4life.org

Animals killed at Miami-Dade Animal Services

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