

STATE NEWS

Ohio among worst states in nation in ‘Horrible Hundred’ puppy mill report

Chad Murphy

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The stories are heartbreaking for animal lovers.

Dogs being kept in filthy, decrepit conditions, dogs with dental disease and a general lack of veterinary care. And perhaps worst of all, “incorrect tools” – including rusty scissors, human nail clippers, horse hoof trimmers and box cutters – being used for tail docking and dewclaw removal.

These are among the citations found by state and U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors at puppy mills in Ohio, according to the Humane Society of the United States. The Buckeye State is ranked second in the nation in the Humane Society’s “Horrible Hundred” report, having 20 of the 100 problem puppy mills on the list.

Only Missouri is worse, with 23.

“Amputating a dog’s tail for cosmetic reasons is already a controversial practice even when performed by a licensed veterinarian who utilizes pain medication, but to dock a tail at home with tools like a box cutter is horrifyingly cruel,” Mark Finneran, Ohio state director for the Humane Society of the United States, said in a statement. “State statute prohibits tail docking by anyone other than a veterinarian, and we call on the Ohio Department of Agriculture to stop allowing this blatant cruelty.”

What is the Humane Society’s Horrible Hundred report?

The Humane Society’s annual report details violations or concerns at 100 puppy mills across the country in an effort to educate the public about the prevalent conditions in these breeding operations.

Combing through state and USDA inspection records, the Humane Society found several instances of poor practices at puppy mills throughout the US:

- An Iowa breeder doing his own at-home neuter surgeries.
- A Missouri puppy mill where one dog died from a lice infestation and others from wounds.
- An Oklahoma facility – linked to the American Kennel Club – whose kennel had such a bad rodent infestation that dogs were eating mice feces with their food.

None of them received a significant fine or penalty, according to the Humane Society.

“Our report is the tip of the iceberg – as shocking as circumstances are in licensed puppy mills, there are many operations that aren’t inspected at all due to legal loopholes,” John Goodwin, senior director of the Humane Society of the United States’ Stop Puppy Mills campaign, said in a statement. “It’s critical for the public to understand the full picture of where their puppies come from, and they won’t get that on a breeder’s website or in a pet store.”

What can Ohioans do about puppy mills? Humane Society encourages support of House Bill 443

The Humane Society says that Ohioans can combat puppy mills by never buying a dog from a pet store or internet site, or from a breeder they haven’t met in person and thoroughly researched.

The Humane Society also supports Ohio House Bill 443, which would allow municipalities to regulate pet stores in their communities.

The bill seeks to undo current law – enacted in 2016 at Chillicothe, Ohio-based Petland’s behest – that strips away local control and gives sole oversight to the state of Ohio, according to the Columbus Dispatch.

The bill’s backers say the state allows companies like Petland to take sick animals from puppy mills and sell them for thousands of dollars to customers who believe their new dog has a good bill of health. Petland spokeswoman Maria Smith disagrees. Smith said Petland never uses puppy mills and offers a warranty for unexpected veterinary costs. Pets undergoing medical treatment aren’t available for visits or sales until they’re healthy and cleared by a state veterinarian, Smith said.

Which Ohio breeders are cited in the Horrible Hundred list?

Here are the 20 Ohio breeders who made the Horrible Hundred:



The Humane Society of the United States is assisting the Johnston County Sheriff’s Office in the rescue of dozens of dogs and puppies from a rural Oklahoma property as part of an alleged cruelty situation at two puppy mills in Milburn on March 11. MEREDITH LEE, FOR THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

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● **Atlee A. Barkman, Barkman’s Country Kennel of Baltic, Ohio:** State officials sent eight of the breeder’s violations for legal referral in 2023 and 2022 “due to the repetitive occurrence” of the issue, according to the Humane Society. Violations in 2023 include a dog with a cloudy eye, a Shiba Inu with toenails that were “excessively long,” and some incomplete records. In 2022, the issues were related to dogs who were not deemed healthy prior to breeding, dogs who didn’t have adequate flooring and dogs entering or leaving the kennel without proper documentation.

● **John R. Garman of Plymouth, Ohio:** Twice, the kennel received violations for having no plan for parasite testing, according to the Humane Society. The breeder also received a direct violation, one of the most serious that USDA can give, for a dog with noticeable dental disease. After receiving an official USDA warning letter, he canceled his USDA license but still retains his Ohio one.

● **Alvin H. Hershberger, Walnut Lane LAH of Dundee, Ohio:** Inspectors found 14 violations during a December 2023 visit, including dirty conditions and puppies on dangerous gapped flooring that could entrap feet, according to the Humane Society. Inspectors also noted “incorrect tools” were being kept for tail docking and dewclaw removal.

● **Rudy L. Lee, Lee Family Kennel of Kinsman, Ohio:** Breeder failed to have kennel tested for B. canis, a contagious zoonotic disease, according to the Humane Society. An inspection that same year found that Lee still did not have a complete annual plan for some requirements. Also, the breeder was ordered to have dogs with eye disorders examined.

● **William Mathias of Dover, Ohio:** Breeder had recurring violations at five different inspections between December 2022 and December 2023, according to the Humane Society. Issues include missing records, failure to have female dogs examined before breeding them, keeping dogs and puppies on dangerous wire flooring, and lack of a proper disease monitoring program. The Humane Society says this is his second appearance on the list.

● **Atlee M. Miller of Sugarcreek, Ohio:** According to the Humane Society, state inspectors found the breeder was cutting dewclaws off puppies with an unapproved tool and at inappropriate ages. Other issues found at the kennel included many dogs without adequate flooring and poor record-keeping. In 2022, the state referred two violations to legal counsel “due to the repetitive occurrence of the violation and the licensee being put on previous notice.”

● **David A. Miller of Millersburg,**

Ohio: The licensee was repeatedly warned about brokering (wholesaling) puppies without a license, according to the Humane Society. Miller is licensed to sell only puppies he has raised on his property; selling puppies bred by others (brokering) is a significant violation because it indicates that puppies could be sold from unlicensed breeders as if they were from an inspected dealer. Also, inspectors noted two litters of puppies lacked adequate solid flooring.

● **Eli J. Miller of Millersburg, Ohio:** According to the Humane Society, the breeder was previously referred to the state’s legal counsel due to an injured dog with lacerations. In December 2023, inspectors found he was keeping an inappropriate cutting tool – a utility knife or box cutter – for use on puppies’ tails. The Humane Society says this is his second appearance on the report.

● **Melvin A. Miller of Baltic, Ohio:** Violations were sent to legal counsel due to an AKC breeder repeatedly breeding dogs without having the mother dogs examined prior to breeding to ensure that they were healthy, according to the Humane Society. Other violations found some dogs were kept in a cage with less than half of the required solid floor space.

● **Mose A. Miller, Maple View Kennel of Baltic, Ohio:** In June 2023, Miller received a USDA warning for a failure to maintain an adequate program of veterinary care, according to the Humane Society. Issues with inadequate veterinary care had been found at three inspections between September 2022 and May 2023. Earlier violations at the kennel included dirty conditions and excessive feces, and dogs who were missing rabies vaccinations and parasite testing.

● **Wayne E. Miller, Pine Creek Puppies of Millersburg, Ohio:** Violations were sent to legal counsel after state inspectors documented almost a dozen violations between two inspections in December 2023. Violations were mostly related to dogs who were not receiving the required medical examinations prior to breeding and whelping puppies, as required by Ohio law. One of these dogs was an Australian shepherd with a known heart murmur, a condition that could be passed on to her puppies.

● **Andy Nisley, Nunda Valley Kennels of Howard, Ohio:** According to the Humane Society, state inspectors found a poodle with a cloudy eye that was not receiving veterinary treatment; they required Nisley to have the dog evaluated. Also, USDA inspectors found Nisley was not giving monthly heartworm preventative to his dogs and hadn’t for a few years. The Humane Society says this is the breeder’s third appearance in the Horrible Hundred.

● **Daniel J. Schlabach of Apple Creek, Ohio:** Inspectors cited the breeder for using small metal hoof trimmers to cut puppies’ tails, according to the Humane Society. Tail docking should normally be performed by a veterinarian, but Ohio’s kennel law allows some breeders to perform the procedure if they have adequate veterinary guidance, which Schlabach apparently did not have. Three other issues were referred to the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s legal counsel, including breeding young dogs without certifying that they were healthy first and failing to have a proper disease control plan.

● **Enos and/or Mary Shetler, Wood-**

side Kennel, aka County Line Kennel LLC of Fredericktown, Ohio: In June 2023, Enos Shetler received an official USDA warning for failure to provide adequate veterinary care after four young puppies died, according to the Humane Society. The USDA also gave Shetler a violation for inappropriately documenting medical records. Shortly after receiving the warning, Enos Shetler canceled his USDA license, but a new license at almost the same street address was opened the very same month under the name of County Line Kennel LLC.

● **Laverne D. Troyer of Mount Gilead, Ohio:** About 70 dogs died in a fire after apparently being left alone with a wood burning stove, according to the Humane Society. The Columbus Dispatch reports that state inspectors found violations just weeks prior but did not take any enforcement action before or after the fire. Troyer currently has a USDA license, according to the Humane Society, which is his third USDA license in recent years.

● **Reuben H. Troyer of Baltic, Ohio:** According to the Humane Society, state inspectors found out Troyer “has been using toenail trimmers to perform tail docking,” and added that “a discussion was had with the licensee about approved instruments to be used for this procedure.” In addition, the inspectors found a male Maltese who earlier had been found to be in need of a dental procedure, but “corrective actions were not taken.”

● **Reuben M. Troyer of Millersburg, Ohio:** State inspectors found 11 separate violations at Troyer’s kennel, according to the Humane Society. Most of the issues were related to dogs and puppies who did not have enough space. One nursing mother dog had no water, and some of the dogs and puppies were kept on dangerous open metal flooring.

● **Andy A. Yoder, A&E Kennel of Sugarcreek, Ohio:** State inspectors found a dozen different violations at A&E Kennel, according to the Humane Society, mostly for issues related to dogs without enough space, inappropriate housing and a lack of proper veterinary documentation. One of the issues concerned lack of a proper plan for tail docking and dewclaw removal, including a lack of a pain control or clotting plan and lack of a plan for cleaning and disinfecting instruments.

● **Marvin H. Yoder, Willow Lot Kennel of Millersburg, Ohio:** According to the Humane Society, state inspectors found that at least four puppies were sold to a pet store, Harbor Pet Center, without the required veterinary documentation. In addition, inspectors took a photograph of a pair of rusty scissors, which indicated it was being used for tail docking. Finally, the Ohio Department of Agriculture referred the breeder to legal counsel because the breeder repeatedly bred a dog without having a veterinarian ensure that they were healthy first.

● **Myron Yoder of Baltic, Ohio:** In late April, Yoder received a Direct violation for a poodle who was unable to fully bear weight on one leg, according to the Humane Society. The injury was due to an incident that had happened two weeks prior, yet the injury had clearly been left to linger. Another dog had an open wound on her neck that also hadn’t been treated by a veterinarian. In addition, some very young puppies were found on gridded flooring that could entrap their legs, the facility had excessive excreta, and none of the 124 adult dogs had had physical examinations since November 2021.

How often do dog breeders have to be inspected?

High-volume dog breeders are inspected once a year by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, ODA spokesperson Bryan Levin told the Columbus Dispatch in a previous article. If violations are found, inspectors may come back for follow-ups. Commercial dog breeders are also examined annually by inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

How many commercial dog breeders are in Ohio?

There are 475 high-volume dog breeders in Ohio, according to ODA records. There are just five ODA inspectors to inspect each of these breeders annually, Levin said.