

Gaston County scraps gas chamber at animal shelter

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ABSTRACT

To animal welfare advocates, the carbon monoxide gas chamber at the Gaston County Animal Shelter long ago became a symbol of inhumanity. The gas chamber was left in place to put down animals deemed so dangerous or unmanageable that using lethal injection would be unsafe for Animal Control employees.

FULL TEXT

To animal welfare advocates, the carbon monoxide gas chamber at the Gaston County Animal Shelter long ago became a symbol of inhumanity.

The large, stainless steel device hadn't been used with any regularity for some time, as Gaston County Animal Control euthanizes by lethal injection now. But on Wednesday, the county got rid of it altogether.

The rectangular box was unceremoniously unhooked, carried out on a forklift and toted away on the back of a truck. It was transported to Webb Metals in Dallas, where it was scrapped, said Gaston County Police Capt. Bill Melton.

Melton said the gas chamber's removal was the latest of many positive changes at Animal Control.

"As part of that process, we've been looking at a lot of things from one end of the shelter to the other," he said.

"And one of the things we determined was that since the chamber wasn't being used, we could use that space for the housing of cats."

The use of carbon monoxide gas to euthanize unwanted pets was once common across the state. But it became looked down upon as animal welfare became more of a priority. By late 2010, public pressure prompted Gaston County commissioners to insist that intravenous lethal injection become the primary measure for euthanizing strays at the public shelter in Dallas.

The gas chamber was left in place to put down animals deemed so dangerous or unmanageable that using lethal injection would be unsafe for Animal Control employees. But those situations were rare.

It was used nine times in 2013, and three times this year - the last of which was Jan. 27 on a deer, Melton said.

Melton said there are procedures in place now that make the chamber obsolete here.

"The conversion had been made completely," he said. "So it was the right time to move it out."

Plans are to renovate the space in the back of the building where the gas chamber once sat and use it accommodate stray cats that must be held at the shelter.

Melton said it's another step forward.

"Our hope is that we provide the best service we can for our animals and our community," he said.

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The gas chamber at the Gaston County Animal Shelter was only used 12 times in the last two years. Most animals are euthanized by lethal injection.

Year Animals taken in at shelter Animals euthanized Euthanasia rate
2014 5,390 1,999 37 percent

2013 6,854 2,634 38 percent

Credit: Michael Barrett

DETAILS

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