

SHELTER PERSPECTIVES ON DEVOCALIZATION

Humane organizations agree: Surgically stifling a dog's or cat's voice does *not* guarantee s/he won't be given up, and barking does *not* force owners or shelters to euthanize. Responsible ownership is an animal's best assurance of a secure home. What does that mean? Don't put groups of animals or breeds hardwired for frequent vocalization where noise will not be tolerated. Provide sufficient exercise and companionship, because dogs vocalize more when bored and lonely. Consult a veterinarian to rule out medical reasons for problem vocalization and a behavior expert to resolve the psychological or environmental triggers—or learned behaviors. And spay/neuter: In addition to health benefits, it will reduce the hormone-driven aggression or excitement that can cause excessive vocalization.

Some breeds vocalize more than others. This must be part of the decision-making process before bringing a pet home or deciding to breed animals. Similarly, it is essential to consider whether one can provide an appropriate environment and care. A dog left alone much of the day is more likely to bark excessively, as are dogs kept in groups. A dog who is easily excitable is not the best choice for an apartment, where he will hear and respond to many external noises throughout the day and night. We prefer “barky” dogs be surrendered to a humane organization than devocalized. There are enough people who understand that dogs bark to communicate, and will care for, train and house them responsibly, so normal behavior needn't become a “problem.”

FRIENDS OF THE PLYMOUTH POUND

There are a multitude of reasons people surrender, abandon and order convenience euthanasia for pets unrelated to barking or meowing: They find a new love interest, suffer health or financial problems, move, get married or divorced. What's more, devocalizing does not keep an animal from house soiling, digging up the garden or darting out the door. Owners who rely on convenience surgeries—that mask rather than resolve the problem—may be more apt to surrender or euthanize animals exhibiting other nuisance behaviors for which there are no surgical “fixes.”

BUDDY DOG HUMANE SOCIETY, SUDBURY

Devocalization doesn't keep dogs from becoming homeless—few shelters can lay claim to never having housed a devocalized dog. And if the pro-devocalization lobby were truly serious about keeping animals out of shelters, they would be working much harder to address the real reasons animals are in shelters in the first place, (including) people who have unrealistic expectations of their animals' normal behaviors.

DAKIN PIONEER VALLEY HUMANE SOCIETY, LEVERETT AND GREENFIELD

A memorable Bichon-Frise graced our presence **twice**. Why is she memorable? Because an owner made her undergo the unneeded surgery to get her “debarked.” They gave her up anyway as did her adopter, who became ill and couldn't care for her. Surgery to “quiet” animals doesn't mean they won't end up in a shelter!

BERKSHIRE HUMANE SOCIETY, PITTSFIELD

We adopted out a young Golden Retriever who had been devocalized. He still made noise, but it was a raspy, disturbing sound, which begs the question, why subject an animal to the pain and stress of this elective surgery?

WORCESTER ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE

*The devocalized Golden Retriever we adopted out still made noise, but it was a raspy, disturbing sound. So why subject animals to the pain and stress of this surgery?
Worcester Animal Rescue League*

When I did animal rescue work after Hurricane Katrina, it was the barking dogs whose lives I was able to save. A dog who has been devocalized would never have the opportunity to warn of danger against his human or himself. We see enough cruelty against dogs on a regular basis than to ever justify one more. There are plenty of other options to curb barking.

SHIRLEY MOORE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SAVE A DOG, SUDBURY

We adopted out three devocalized Standard Poodles in the past two years. One had been tethered outside most of the day, and barked his loneliness. After having his vocal cords severed, the owner gave him away. Two dogs were littermates whose owner had them devocalized and subsequently gave them up because she had too many animals. The claim that surgically “quieting” dogs will prevent abandonment is absurd. Devocalization does not increase an owner’s commitment to or responsible care of her or his animal. It also does not make dogs more appealing. The strange voice they are left may make it more difficult to find them new homes.

POODLE RESCUE OF NEW ENGLAND, SOMERVILLE

Animals who vocalize incessantly are likely to do so because they are suffering frustration, loneliness or excitement. For “talkative” breeds, NEFHS recommends placement into environments where vocalization is accepted. The relatively low population of sheltered dogs throughout New England makes it unlikely an otherwise well-behaved but noisy dog will be euthanized for lack of a home. Devocalizing for the convenience of breed fanciers is inhumane.

LESLIE HARRIS, NEW ENGLAND FEDERATION OF HUMANE SOCIETIES

The MSPCA does not condone devocalization of animals for nonmedical purposes or perform it at our hospitals. A responsible owner chooses a pet carefully, and is willing to socialize and train a pet that is vocalizing excessively.

MASS. SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS, BOSTON

There are no guarantees that by having this procedure done, dogs and cats will not end up at a shelter. Devocalization is inhumane and unnecessary.

BAYPATH HUMANE SOCIETY, HOPKINTON

We have never had a dog surrendered to us for barking too much. Devocalization is an act of cruelty.

NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY FOR ABANDONED ANIMALS, OSTERVILLE

The breeder who gave up Logan after he was no longer profitable devocalized all her dogs to run her business in a residential neighborhood. Instead, she should have opted for responsible ownership. My neighbors have never complained about my dogs, because I don’t leave them outside unsupervised, and I make time to exercise and play with them. A tired dog is a happy dog! If you don’t have the time or desire to provide for a dog’s need to run, play and interact with you, don’t breed or have dogs as pets. Vocal cord surgery doesn’t change their basic needs. It only makes it easier to ignore them.

GAYLE FITZPATRICK, 30-YEAR RESCUE VOLUNTEER, PLYMOUTH

Vocal cord surgery doesn't change (an animal's) basic needs. It only makes it easier to ignore them.
Gayle Fitzpatrick

Devocalization is an inhumane substitute for proper pet selection, commitment and responsibility. Some breeds, like Shelties or Siamese cats, are chatty. If a person doesn't like barking or bellowing, why get a talkative breed? If one can't devote time to training and playing with a pet, why get one at all? Common sense and compassion should prevail, but too often don't. It is important to make this bill a law.

STANDISH HUMANE SOCIETY, DUXBURY

Devocalization is an act of mutilation which compromises the animal, and is not empirically beneficial to the well-being of the animal.

MASSPAWS, WINTHROP

Vocalization deemed bothersome is only the symptom, whether of a distressed animal or improper care and training. Because cutting a pet's vocal cords is a "quick fix" that *doesn't* fix the underlying problem, the animal faces potential abandonment or euthanasia even after being subjected to a painful surgery.

MARBLEHEAD ANIMAL SHELTER

Bothersome vocalization is only the symptom, whether of distress or improper care and training. Cutting vocal cords doesn't fix that.
Marblehead Animal Shelter

Devocalization is a callous practice that does not help animals and, further, discourages responsible pet ownership.

NORTHEAST ANIMAL SHELTER, SALEM

As the member of Underdog ResQ who performs temperament testing, I can attest: Devocalization is dangerous, not only to animals, but also to the human population. Dogs and cats have specific vocalizations to let a human know they have reached a level of discomfort; it's their warning before they bite or scratch. Any parent would want a dog or cat to be able to warn their child, or a vulnerable senior, when he reaches this level.

JULIE WESSEN, UNDERDOG RESQ, BOSTON

Dogs and cats have specific vocalizations before they bite or scratch. Any parent would want them to be able to warn their child or a senior.
Julie Wessen, UnderdogResQ

The underlying cause should be addressed by pet owners; spaying or neutering is an essential first step to reduce the territoriality and aggression that can be the root of excessive vocalizing. Subjecting a pet to surgery strictly for the owner's selfish best-interest is cruel. Because callous disregard for an animal's welfare doesn't happen in isolation, we would rather a dog be surrendered to a reputable shelter than be debarked.

BOSTON DOG RESCUE

An owner made her get debarked. They gave her up anyway, as did her adopter. Surgery to "quiet" animals doesn't mean they won't end up in a shelter! Berkshire Humane Society