

# "On Renting Dog's"

Could be as cruel as living in Puppy Mills

I have been asked to circulate this information on the a company known as FlexPetz, <http://www.flexpetz.com/>. They are setting up shop in major cities on both coasts.

FlexPetz is a business that rents dogs, by the hour or day—like ZipCars—to people who want the fun of a pet without commitment. Animal welfare organizations say its marketing claim of “rescuing” homeless dogs is specious: Pet rentals may deprive a formerly adoptable animal of ever finding a loving, permanent home. What’s more, experts are concerned that this practice opens a Pandora’s box of consumer protection and public safety, along with animal welfare, issues.

## Expert Perspectives on the Renting of Pets

- **Patricia, McConnell, PhD Zoologist, Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist; and author, *For the Love of a Dog: Understanding Emotion in You and Your Best Friend***

Renting companion dogs and cats like videotapes and rototillers? To even the most stringent of scientists, it is unethical and cruel to "rent" an animal capable of intense emotional experiences. Extensive research shows being forced into an unstable social setting causes extreme stress to group-living animals, especially dogs.

Like people, dogs and cats require the world to have some predictability and familiar patterns. Being "rented" and passed around as if they were objects would be psychologically devastating to most.

I have rarely felt this strongly about an issue related to human and companion animal welfare. Renting out dogs and cats is close enough to "renting out children" for people who'd rather only bother with them for a weekend that I can barely believe it is happening.

*Dr. McConnell has provided consultations and treatment plans for serious behavior problems in cats and dogs for over 20 years. Her nationally syndicated radio show, Wisconsin Public Radio's Calling All Pets, plays in over 115 cities. She is Adjunct Associate Professor in Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, teaching "The Biology and Philosophy of Human/Animal Relationships," and author of nine books on training and behavioral problems.*

## ▪ **Animal Control Officers Association of Massachusetts**

Fear and stress, which are often portrayed by dogs through biting and aggressive behavior, are exacerbated by the absence of routine. It is a known fact that the incessant transfer from one person and home to another is a perfect recipe for creating instability and stress in dogs. Imagine the turmoil that results when one renter allows a dog to lie on the couch, and the next renter swats the dog with a newspaper for the very same behavior. The behavioral, liability and humane issues that arise from renting pets cannot be ignored in the name of profit.

- **Paul Waldau, PhD, JD, Director, Center for Animals and Public Policy, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University**

At first, it might seem one is renting any number of virtues—companionship, affection, play, a friend—when one rents a dog. But the realities for a rental pet are these: There is no single owner who really cares about him, no continuity of life, no real home, no consistent companion that can result in a mutual “understanding.” (Yes, our pets are intelligent enough to understand much of what we do for them). Imagine yourself the rental dog. What if you become chronically ill? Who will care for or adopt you? What if you bite out of fear or confusion, after being passed from renter to renter, one bond broken after the next? You're excess merchandise, and no business can hold onto excess. Licensing pet rental businesses is bad public policy.

## **Animal Law Offices of Jonathan Stone Rankin**

While the potential for animal abuse is apparent, consumers—used to renting cars and NetFlix—may not consider their legal exposure if the pet under their care harms someone. Indemnification or liability insurance, if offered, may not adequately protect pet rental clients from the stress and/or staggering costs of litigation. Additionally, there could be questions as to liability and coverage if the animal bites the renter. Caveat emptor: Consumers would be well advised to have their attorney read the fine print **before** signing up to rent a pet.

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## ▪ **Buddy Dog Humane Society**

Buddy Dog urges the legislature to pass "An Act Prohibiting the Renting of Pets" this session. Pet rental businesses like FlexPetz offer seductive selling points without disclosing the downside of renting out pets. For rental pets, it's always "fun time," according to marketing claims. We who care for casualties of the "disposable pet syndrome" rental businesses promote know better.

## ▪ **Northeast Pyrenees Rescue**

All legitimate rescue organizations follow strict procedures, including home visits and background checks of applicants and discussion with their veterinarians. FlexPetz' claim of obtaining its dogs from rescue groups and shelters is absolutely not possible unless FlexPetz acquires them in a deceptive manner! We implore the legislature to say no to pet rental or "flexible ownership" businesses.

## ▪ **Jo Jacques, Certified Dog Behavior Consultant**

Constantly breaking companion animals' bonds could ruin their chance for a "forever home" when the business is done with them. These animals will become distrustful of humans; they will withdraw. If they're not adopted or it fails as a result? Off to a shelter, but older, more confused—and more likely to be euthanized or spend the rest of their lives in cages.

## ▪ **Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

The MSPCA does not adopt cats or dogs to an entity that would rent them. While FlexPetz or other organizations may claim they "rescue" dogs, what they are really doing is taking dogs that are most adoptable and depriving them of being adopted by loving, permanent homes.

## ▪ **Animal Rescue League of Boston**

The ARL opposes the practice of renting companion dogs and cats, and would not adopt or loan a pet to a pet rental ("flexible ownership") business. The ARL suggests those who are not ready to commit to pet ownership pursue more humane options, such as volunteering at a local animal shelter...or helping elderly or infirm neighbors, who otherwise might have difficulty caring for beloved pets. Initiatives such as these help strengthen our communities.

## ▪ **Humane Society of the United States**

Frequent and abrupt changes in location, routine, discipline and attention are confusing and are likely to lead to stress-induced behavior problems. Pets are not like cars or furniture. Pet rental companies, such as FlexPetz, are not likely to benefit the overall welfare of the pets they rent.

## ▪ **American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

(Flexible pet ownership) is fundamentally different from the practice animal shelters and rescues have of fostering pets, unlike the claims of some news reports. Humane groups and SPCAs often use foster programs for nursing mothers and litters or dogs and cats with special behavioral or medical needs. The primary aim is to provide a loving, safe environment until a permanent home can be found—fundamentally different than the FlexPetz concept.

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