

Complaint: Transporting dogs into Colorado without required health and rabies certificates:

I went on seven rescue trips in the last two years with National Mill Dog Rescue. It was on the sixth trip that questions were raised about this issue after witnessing Theresa Strader's interaction with a breeder. On July 29, 2017 during one of the stops to pick up dogs, a breeder asked Theresa where she was going to get rabies and health certs for the dogs because she was "getting heat over it from other breeders." Theresa told her the dogs were being taken to Dr. Welborn and the breeder asked her to write down his name. What raised suspicion was that we were going in the opposite direction from where Butler Animal Clinic was located, which is in Butler, Missouri. In fact, there was no stop for any rabies or health certificates. After that incident, I became aware that dogs were being transported without them on a frequent basis and have been for years. I have documentation dating back to 2008.

During the rescue mission, my last, which followed on August 26, 2017, I asked Theresa Strader if we were stopping for health certificates and rabies vaccines. Chuck Arnold, who was a board member and is now chief operating officer, was on the trip. The reply was hostile double-talk and the rest of the trip was miserable. There was no stop for rabies or health certificates.

There is a form for each dog that has the date of intake, which state the dog is from, and when the vaccines were given. An audit of those documents will confirm that a very conservative estimate of 90% of dogs rescued in other states were brought to Colorado without required certificates and vaccinated at NMDR, and more often than not, a veterinarian did not administer the rabies vaccine.

When North Shore Animal League of America is involved, the dogs are vaccinated prior to being transferred. However, any dogs that are picked up AFTER the transfer and taken to NMDR are not vaccinated until they arrive at the facility in Peyton, Colorado. Rarely, NMDR will arrange for vaccines and health certificates while on the road, but it is the exception and not the rule. Check the number of certificates that are filed by NMDR with the USDA regarding imported dogs and it will confirm this claim.

Complaint: Falsifying rabies certificates

Theresa Strader, the executive director, typically vaccinates the dogs. I witnessed inconsistent practices as it relates to the vaccines. The volunteer or staff member who is filling out the rabies certificate does not put Theresa's initials on the intake sheet as the one who administered the vaccine. This is per Theresa's directive. There is video from May 30, 2018 in which Theresa is instructing a volunteer not to put her initials even though she can "take blood from a baby's skull, so I think I can give a dog a shot."

Video from last Sunday, December 30, 2018, shows the process. After the rabies vaccine is given, the volunteer is using the veterinarian's stamp. I have found that Dr. Traci Duncanson's stamp is used, but the rabies certificates are taken in a stack to Dr. Debbie St. Louis for an actual signature. As was the case on December 30, Dr. Duncanson was not present or even scheduled to work that day. I have internal communication from Dr. St. Louis asking what part of the rabies certificate she needs to fill out.

There have been at least two tragic incidents involving senior dogs who were not seen by veterinarians prior to being vaccinated with 5-way and rabies by Theresa Strader. The dogs were clearly in poor health, as seen in pictures and videos that were sent to post on social media during the rescue missions. Both dogs, Lydia (arrived 4/20/18) and Ivy (arrived 5/29/18), had to be euthanized a short time after arriving. On May 30, 2018, a pregnant Shih Tzu named Mindy was vaccinated by Theresa Strader prior to being seen by a veterinarian. Once examined by a vet, it was determined that she was within weeks of delivering puppies.

Complaint: Sick animals being transported into Colorado

On July 29, 2017, a mother cat and her three kittens were picked up as part of a courtesy transport for Wild Blue Cat Sanctuary and brought to Colorado. I was letting them lick Nutracal off of my fingers while in the back of the rescue van. I learned two days later that all four died because they had feline panleukopenia.

On September 15, 2017, several Huskies were transported back to the kennel and placed in an outside area. A few had bloody diarrhea and it was later discovered that two had parvovirus. The dogs were brought to Colorado without health or rabies certificates by Theresa Strader.

On March 14, 2018, 41 dogs were rescued from squalid conditions in Arkansas by an out-of-state rescue group. Twenty-one of the dogs were transported to National Mill Dog Rescue on March 24. They were not placed in isolation, despite the horrific conditions in which they came and the fact that they were in a shelter prior to being transferred to NMDR. The dogs went through intake on March 25 and were housed throughout the kennel. Ultimately, it was discovered that at least 11 had distemper and died or were euthanized. Some of the dogs were transferred to Second Chance Humane Society in Ridgway, Colorado prior to the discovery. Staff and volunteers at NMDR were not notified, nor were recent adopters put on alert to watch for symptoms in their dogs. Meet and Greets were temporarily suspended, but the staff was not notified about why or informed of protocol for disinfecting areas.

On August 7, 2018, an elderly Chihuahua named "Mookie" was transported to the kennel. In the video, COO Chuck Arnold said that Mookie spent 12 hours in the van standing up and obviously did not feel well. Mookie was placed in an ex-pen in the arena area of the kennel and a couple of days later, moved to isolation because "he might have something contagious". In a vet reported dated 8/20/18, it is noted that his lungs and bronchial pattern could be indicative of pneumonia. Sadly, Mookie was later euthanized. Mookie was brought to Colorado, along with the rest of the dogs who were in rough shape, without health or rabies certificates by Chuck Arnold. He was a board member for a couple of years and has been on more than two dozen rescue trips.

On December 29, 2018, five Labrador-mix puppies were transported to the kennel. Upon arrival, they were taken to an isolation room where they had bloody diarrhea and Theresa Strader, as well as volunteers and staff members, expressed concern that they could have parvo. They were not seen by a veterinarian until December 31. Although they were taken to isolation, there is strong evidence that the sick puppies were picked up along with three Great Dane puppies and two Dachshund puppies from Dorothy's Pet Shop in Junction City, Kansas. Those puppies were not isolated; rather they were put into the general population and vaccinated the next day.

Complaint: Dogs being transferred to other facilities without proper certification

As of November 2018, 448 of 1133 dogs that were rescued by NMDR were taken to other shelters. Dogs were transferred to other facilities within Colorado on the following dates. This is not an inclusive list, as I was often kept out of the flow of information and there was instruction in November to stop posting on social media about the transfers. A large percentage are transferred to other facilities with falsified rabies certificates and were brought to Colorado without required paperwork:

Aspen Animal Shelter

06/02/18 - 11 dogs

06/11/18 - 9 dogs

07/07/18 (two nights/four people) - 10 dogs

07/16/18 - 10 dogs

07/23/18 - ?? dogs

09/04/18 - ?? dogs (at least 5)
09/28/18 - ?? dogs
12/10/18 - at least 6 dogs, including Juneau
01/02/19 - ?? dogs

Second Chance Humane Society - Ridgway

01/31/17 - ?? dogs
05/17/17 - 10 dogs
06/14/17 - 9 dogs
08/24/17 - 8 dogs
01/18/18 - 12 dogs
02/27/18 - 5 dogs plus puppies
03/25/18 - Arkansas hoarding dogs - number unknown
07/23/18 - ?? dogs
10/29/18 - 16 dogs

Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region

10-17-18 - 14 dogs
11-28-18 - 15 dogs

Complaint: Underage puppies being transported into Colorado and transferred to another shelter

Juneau, a 5-year-old Husky, was transported into Colorado from Missouri on 12/5/18. They went through intake on 12/6/18 and were transferred to Aspen Animal Shelter on 12/10/18. In a post on Aspen Animal Shelter's website on 12/23/18, the puppies are reported to be three and a half weeks old. A second post on 12/24/18 shows pictures of the puppies. That would indicate the puppies were approximately a week old when transported to NMDR's facility and a few days later, transferred to Aspen.

Complaint: Dogs not receiving medical care or being altered in a timely fashion

The number of dogs that are brought to the kennel are overburdening the veterinary staff. There are not complex surgeries that are being put on hold. Spay and neuter procedures are delayed and have resulted in dogs getting pregnant while in NMDR's care.

Two examples: Shandy, a 9-year-old Maltese who also ended up with a broken leg prior to delivery (2/16/17) and Iris, a senior Chihuahua who arrived in September 2017,

Snowman is a senior Chihuahua. His paperwork indicates he arrived at NMDR on 3/7/18 from Kansas, but his intake/vaccines were not done until 3/20/18. He was neutered on 7/30/18 and his dental was done on 9/4/18.

The five sick puppies that arrived on 12/29/18 were not seen by a veterinarian for at least two days, even though several people (staff and volunteers) were concerned they could have parvo.

Ivy, the silky terrier who was ultimately euthanized, has a discrepancy in her medical report. The date of intake was 5/29/18. She was vaccinated by Theresa Strader on 5/30/18, but the medical intake report indicates Ivy was examined by a veterinarian on 5/6/18, which is impossible.

Jethro, a 5-year-old Beagle, arrived on May 29, 2019. His posture was hanging his head and staring at the wall. It was not until months later, when Jethro was finally being neutered to go to his new home, that it was discovered he had cancer. Jethro was euthanized.

“Tent City” is a common occurrence. This is when there are so many dogs that they are placed in ex-pens in the arena area and larger dogs are housed in outside kennels. On 9/11/18 during a Directors Meeting, Kennel Operations Director Kim Lehmann expressed concern over the consistent overcrowding at the kennel and said, “Dogs are fighting through the fence, humping and even tying .” The response by Theresa Strader was that at least they were alive and the conditions are better than what they were living in. There have been incidents of dogs attacked and severely injured: Oscar had to have surgery (1/15/18), Fonda had to be transported to an emergency vet after a fight (4/4/18), and Jubilee attacked by Yummy (4/30/17).

Complaint: Refusal to be compliant by NMDR management & board of directors

Once it became evident that these violations were common practices at NMDR for years, I attempted to have a conversation with Theresa Strader. I was rebuffed on two occasions, so I sought advice from my personal legal counsel. On May 20, I was advised to report the violations anonymously to PACFA. I chose to explore other options internally and contacted Chris Thornton, the chairman of the board on May 28. This is what NMDR’s Whistleblower policy instructs an employee or volunteer to do. I met with him on June 7, 2018 for almost two hours. Chris was shocked by the information I gave him and said the board just does whatever Theresa wants because “it is her company and she’s running the show.” He added that he was just a volunteer and was unpaid to be the chairman of the board. I followed up with two emails to him, both of which went unanswered.

Shortly after my meeting with Chris Thornton, Chuck Arnold (also a board member who frequently goes on rescue trips) was appointed Chief Operating Officer. I met with Chuck on July 16 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. During that meeting, Chuck told me he knew about my conversation with Chris Thornton and told me not to expect much from Theresa as it relates to videos. He told me the dogs were being vaccinated before transporting now. However, that is not the case. Initially, there was an attempt to get some health certificates and rabies vaccines, but dogs were still being brought to the kennel without them.

For example, Chuck Arnold conducted a rescue mission while Theresa Strader was on vacation. He arrived on August 7 with dogs in particularly rough condition that did not have the required paperwork. On the August 30 rescue trip, a volunteer told me Chuck was being “a jerk” about sending me back videos to post and refused to do any for fundraising purposes. Presumably, this was retaliation over having to stop to have dogs vaccinated and get their health certificates. It was one of the few trips where dogs being transported to Colorado did receive the certificates prior to entry into the state.

It quickly became clear that the concern about this practice was not being taken seriously by anyone at the executive level at NMDR or by the board of directors. The chairman of the board carried dogs through the intake process after our meeting in June and stood in line for Theresa Strader to vaccinate them.

In just the last two months alone, the proper procedures for importing dogs into Colorado were blatantly ignored as was the protocol for rabies vaccines. On December 19, Jenny Whitt, the Director of Adoptions Programs, assisted Theresa Strader in filling out paperwork during intake when the vaccines were given. Jenny also selects the dogs who will be transferred to other shelters with the falsified rabies certificates and often accompanies Theresa Strader on those transfer trips to Aspen and Ridgway. Additionally, as the person in charge of the adoptions programs, Jenny is well aware that the rabies certificates that accompany the dogs when they go to their new homes, or are transferred to other facilities, are technically invalid because the vaccine has not been given by a veterinarian.

On December 30, the paperwork was done by a volunteer who is also aware of what the requirements are, yet she assisted Theresa Strader and stamped the rabies certificates.

The irony in this is that if a breeder or pet store was so blatantly noncompliant for so many years, they would most assuredly face serious consequences. Ultimately, my efforts to shine a light on the issues and get them corrected resulted in termination of employment. This is not an unusual move when people start asking questions or noticing what is happening. There is no evidence in the recent or past behavior of those in charge at NMDR that they will adhere to the requirements. Rather, they will likely continue to talk their way out of any accountability and get rid of people who challenge their practices.

I do have documents and/or video to support each claim.