

"Don't give a puppy as a gift this Christmas" warns ISPCA

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA) has launched an appeal to members of the public in County Waterford to call for urgent donations to assist its work in protecting animals at risk in Ireland, while highlighting the sharp increase in cruelty and neglect of animals as a result of the economic downturn. The ISPCA is also warning people not to give a puppy as a gift this Christmas.

The ISPCA has recorded an increase of 45% in calls to its National Animal Cruelty Helpline to the end of November 2009, compared to the same period last year. There were 9,476 calls to the helpline so far this year, compared to 5,202 in the first eleven months of 2008. As a result of the calls received by the National Animal Cruelty Helpline, the ISPCA recorded 1,618 complaints during the year, whereby ISPCA inspectors visit the site of an alleged instance of cruelty.

Barbara Bent, Chairperson of the ISPCA, commented: "These figures clearly demonstrate the effect of the recession on the plight of animals in Ireland. From March onwards, we noted a sharp rise in the number of calls to our helpline and this trend has continued throughout the year, in particular relating to cruelty, neglect and abandonment of horses. We are calling on people to make a donation to the ISPCA or purchase one of our thoughtful gifts this Christmas."

The ISPCA has also warned people about the unsuitability of giving a puppy as a gift this Christmas, advising that it is not the best time of year to introduce a puppy as a family pet. In addition, the organisation has witnessed many cases of older dogs, which may have been given as gifts last Christmas or in previous years, being abandoned in the run up to Christmas to make room for a new puppy.

Barbara Bent noted: "Christmas is simply not the best time of year to introduce a puppy to your household. The shorter evenings and bad weather in December and January, coupled with the fact that children are back at school shortly after the arrival of the puppy, mean that families don't have sufficient time to train and bond with their new pet. We recommend that May is the best month to get a puppy, so that there's plenty of time to establish a routine over the summer months."

She added: "It's a common misconception that our busiest time is after Christmas, when puppies are abandoned by their new owners. Animal welfare organisations across Ireland are finding the run up to the festive period just as busy, because people abandon their older dogs to be replaced with a new puppy as a Christmas present."

The ISPCA urgently needs donations to help in protecting animals at risk in Ireland and in prosecuting those individuals who are responsible for acts of cruelty. Members of the public can make a secure donation at www.ispca.ie or purchase one of the ISPCA's Christmas gifts for animals and animal lovers. The ISPCA also offers a range of thoughtful gifts which help to fund the care of some of Ireland's most abused animals.

How to report animal cruelty to the ISPCA:

If you have witnessed cruelty to any animal in Ireland, please call the ISPCA's National Animal Cruelty Helpline on 1890 515 515. All reports of cruelty are treated with the strictest confidence.

How to donate to the ISPCA

Members of the public can make a secure once off donation to the ISPCA at www.ispca.ie

A range of thoughtful gifts and suggestions on how to raise money for the society are also included on the website. Alternatively, donations can be made by cheque/money order/postal order, using a Visa/Mastercard or Laser card, by lodging funds directly to the ISPCA's account or by standing order – full details are available at www.ispca.ie