

## The Healthy Dog Importation Act

Most of us were dog lovers first, before we learned about English Setters and other specific breeds. We have big hearts and we love lots of animals. That makes us wonderful, caring dog owners but it also makes us easy marks for the people and groups who operate retail rescues.

There absolutely are good rescue groups with people who go above and beyond to help people and dogs in need. You can find them all across the United States. We have several good groups associated with our English Setters. Unfortunately, in the last couple of decades, some people have turned rescue into a money-making business. You can find the stories about these bad rescues online nearly every week. The actions of these bad apples are tainting opinions about rescue in general.

If you've been in purebred dogs a long time then you may remember that at one time most rescue groups were breed-based. They were, in fact, run by breeders and others associated with parent clubs. Breed clubs still operate a huge network of rescues in the United States, taking care of our own as much as possible.

The business of rescue, where mixed breed dogs are bought cheaply and sold for high prices, often with a sad story attached, is something different. In fact, this model worked well for rescue groups for years, along with the spay-neuter mantra. Adoption from shelters and rescues became a popular way for people to obtain a dog. The number of dogs and puppies entering shelters plummeted. Fewer than a million adoptable dogs per year are being put to sleep in the United States. Contrast that number with over 20 million dogs euthanized per year a few decades ago and you can see the improvement.

This news should be something to celebrate but shelters and retail rescue groups have not celebrated. What exactly is their mission? Is it to protect the public from stray and unwanted dogs? To act as a safety net for unwanted American dogs? Or, is it to find ways to stay in business?

Since there are fewer dogs/puppies entering shelters and rescues in the U.S. today, this has left these groups looking for "merchandise." There has been speculation that some groups are breeding their own dogs or working with some breeders in the shadows to supply desirable puppies for adoption but evidence has been lacking.

One sure fire way that shelters and rescues have been obtaining dogs for adoption is by importing them into the U.S. Some of these dogs come over the Mexican and Canadian borders. Some come from China and southeast Asia as "meat dogs." (Seriously, who breeds Chihuahuas and Toy Poodles as "meat dogs"?) Some of them are simply street dogs. Others have come from Egypt and the middle east, Europe, and a hundred other countries.

In fact, groups have been importing over one million dogs into the United States each year. These dogs are not being individually imported to an owner or breeder for a show career. Most of these dogs are being brought over in batches of 30-40 dogs. They may or may not have legitimate health papers and

vaccinations. Some of them have carried diseases that we didn't previously have in the U.S. And, there is no required quarantine period for them.

Most recently, 34 animals (33 dogs and one cat) were imported to the U.S. from Azerbaijan to Chicago. One of the dogs ended up with a family in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He began acting strangely. He later tested positive for rabies despite having paperwork that showed he had allegedly been vaccinated for rabies. At least 12 people were exposed to the dog and will have to undergo the rabies protocol.

The case sparked an investigation across several states. The other animals that were on the flight were supposed to be kept isolated in quarantine, in case they also have rabies, but one of the dogs has escaped quarantine and is now nowhere to be found.

This is the fourth rabid dog that has been imported into the U.S. since 2015 – all of them rescue dogs. All of them had fraudulent rabies paperwork.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced <https://www.cdc.gov/importation/bringing-an-animal-into-the-united-states/high-risk-dog-ban-frn.html> that starting July 14 there will be a one-year ban on dogs from some 113 countries where rabies is still a problem, including Azerbaijan.

The ban is partly due to the spike in the number of puppies denied entry to the U.S. because they were not old enough to be fully vaccinated.

In fact, according to the USDA Animal Welfare Act (AWA), puppies and dogs for resale (which includes adoption) are not supposed to be imported into the U.S. at all until they are at least six months of age [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalwelfare/ct\\_awa\\_import\\_live\\_dogs\\_regulation](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalwelfare/ct_awa_import_live_dogs_regulation). Shelters and rescues have been ignoring this regulation.

There has been outrage from shelters and rescues over the ban. AKC is being blamed for the ban. In fact, the rescues have only themselves to blame for importing underage puppies and dogs with rabies and false paperwork. The rescue that brought in the latest rabid dog is still collecting money and is planning to import dogs right up to the deadline.

Rabies is not the only disease associated with the imported dogs. The H3N2 canine influenza that first appeared in the U.S. in the Chicago area in 2015 was traced to rescue dogs imported from South Korea and China <https://news.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=210&Id=8591157>. Thousands of dogs in the United States became ill as a result of this form of canine influenza. It is now considered to be endemic to the U.S.

Just a few days ago the Healthy Dog Importation Act was introduced in Congress by Congressman Kurt Schrader, DVM (D-OR-5) and Congressman Dusty Johnson (R-SD- ALL). This bill is supported by the American Kennel Club, the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). The act would require that dogs imported into the U.S. submit valid health certificates from a licensed veterinarian accredited by a recognized veterinary authority, be permanently identified, and checked upon entry. It would not ban dogs from any specific country.

We are all dog lovers. We can all feel compassion for dogs in other countries, though sometimes the groups involved are seeking money and running scams. Regardless of their intentions, we need to consider the health and welfare of our own dogs. Importing dogs with fake health certificates and diseases endangers the health of your dogs and mine. Dogs carrying rabies put all of us at risk.

Great strides have been made to reduce the number of dogs euthanized in shelters. Fewer dogs are in need of rescue today. Those are good things. Stop importing more dogs, especially dogs with fake health certificates and questionable back stories. Don't believe everything you read or see online.

Carlotta Cooper  
English Setter Association of America  
Greeneville TN  
[eshever@embarqmail.com](mailto:eshever@embarqmail.com)  
[423 639-6195](tel:4236396195)