



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Hundreds of dogs suffered and many were killed in tests for canine “lifestyle” drug**

**2<sup>nd</sup> February 2009**

**The British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) and the Irish Anti-Vivisection Society (IAVS)** have exposed the plight of almost 300 dogs to test the effects of dirlotapide (Slentrol®), a drug recently marketed to manage canine obesity. In the experiments carried out by drug company **Pfizer**, hundreds of dogs suffered and at least 73 were killed. Most of the experiments took place in the **USA**. One experiment, carried out by **Pfizer UK** (based in Sandwich, Kent), involved Labrador retrievers and took place in **Ireland**.

The studies, published in recent scientific literature, revealed that 114 Labrador retrievers and 175 beagles were given dirlotapide. Some of the experiments continued every day for up to a year and many of the dogs were housed individually, with no mention of exercise or social interaction. In at least one test, the drug was given by gavage (the forcing of a tube down the throat or through the nose into the stomach). Some dogs were also subjected to invasive abdominal surgery to implant tubes. In most of the experiments, some dogs experienced diarrhoea and vomiting.

The source and fate of many of the dogs was not mentioned. In the experiment published by Pfizer, UK, 114 Labrador retrievers were dosed every day with the drug for up to 52 weeks.\* It was not revealed where the dogs came from, how they came to be overweight or obese at the start of the experiment, or what happened to them when the experiment was over.

It was noted by the researchers that once the drug is discontinued, there would be rebound weight gain unless an appropriate diet and exercise regimen is instituted. It should be obvious, therefore, that the latter could have resulted in the same weight loss caused by the drug.

**Chief Executive of the BUAV, Michelle Thew**, says “Pet owners everywhere will be shocked to learn that hundreds of dogs, such as beagles and Labrador retrievers, suffered and many were killed just to study the effects of an unnecessary drug. Pfizer's stated commitment to the health and wellness of pets has to be called into question here. In these experiments, dogs who could otherwise be members of a loving family, were treated as disposable research tools. At the end of the day the answer to helping overweight pets is a restricted diet and regular exercise - everyone knows that.”

**IAVS Spokesperson, Yvonne Smalley**, says "Animal experiments in Ireland are governed by the Cruelty to Animal Act 1876, as amended by EU Regulations 2002 & 2005. Licences are granted subject to the experiment being essential and the objective can not be achieved by the use of alternative techniques. The scientific value of the outcome must be deemed to outweigh the suffering to the animals involved (e.g. licences are not granted to conduct cosmetics testing in Ireland). On this basis, the IAVS believes this work should not have been licensed. We call on the Department of Health to suspend any current licence for ongoing or similar experiments immediately, pending a full investigation into the use of these dogs, the conditions in which they are held and what is happening to the surviving dogs today."

**Veterinary Consultant to the BUAV, Dr Nedim Buyukmihci**, says "In my professional opinion, the published literature fails to demonstrate a medical benefit for Slentrol that cannot be achieved through other safer and more sustainable means such as good pet nutrition and regular exercise. To cause dogs to suffer or to kill them to produce a drug that is nothing more than for convenience is morally unacceptable."

#### NOTES TO EDITORS

\*Gossellin, J.; Peachey, S.; Sherington, J., Rowan, T.G. and Sunderland, S.J. Evaluation of dirlotapide for sustained weight loss in overweight Labrador retrievers. *Journal of Veterinary Pharmacology and Therapeutics* 2007;30;55-65.

The Chief Executive of the BUAV, Michelle Thew, is available for interview.

[The BUAV has been campaigning for over 100 years to achieve a world where nobody wants or believes we need to experiment on animals. We are committed to achieving our aims through reliable and reasoned evidence-based debate. We are proudly non-violent and respect the quality of life for all – animals and people.](#)

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