Yes, my furkids are spoiled. Currently, all six feast on vittles free of byproducts, chemicals and dyes. Awhile back, they ate Iams. Like many consumers, I bought the Iams Company vow of health and longevity. After all, Iams and Eukanuba pet foods undergo extensive research before they reach retail shelves.

But People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) broke my allegiance to Iams with a “dark and sordid secret:” The Procter & Gamble subsidiary funds tests on hundreds of cats and dogs — animals just like my furkids.

For nine months in 2002 and early 2003 a PETA spy worked inside an Iams-sponsored laboratory. At the time, Iams employed over 30 contract labs and university research centers to conduct off-site animal testing. PETA’s findings, available in broadcast video format, generally contradict Iams’ publicized research policy.

Iams Company Research Policy, #4: We will not fund or participate in any study requiring or resulting in the euthanasia of cats or dogs. PETA’s investigator found 60 dazed dogs with muscle chunks severed from their thighs heaped on a cold, paint-flecked floor. Two dogs died post-surgery and at least 27 were killed over the course of the experiment.

Iams Research Policy, #3: We will ensure the humane treatment of cats and dogs, and provide for animal well being, socialization and husbandry. PETA’s observer encountered stir-crazy animals restrained in steel cages or cement cells for up to six years. Dogs cried out in pain when their paws splayed over the metal-slat flooring. In one video clip dogs frantically circled empty enclosures as an aloof Iams rep passed by. Cats occupied a cinderblock room with unstable “resting” boards. One board fatally squashed a cat during the investigation. The lab director did not remove the illegal boards until warned about an impending investigation.

Iams Research Policy, #3: We will also meet or exceed standards established by the Animal Welfare Act of the US, the US Department of Agriculture and Directive 86/609/EEC of the European Union. The investigator noted an extreme lack of veterinary care. Dogs with excessive tartar were unable to chew food. One dog limped due to untreated Lyme disease. A cat who hadn’t eaten for days perished without medical attention. During inspection, an Iams veterinarian ignored a dog who had just delivered puppies in a cement kennel with no bedding. Two dogs died inside the frigid building with 34-degree temperatures.

Another worker recalled a live kitten flushed down a drain. She saw tubes implanted in dogs’ throats, pumping vegetable oil into their bellies.

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Iams Research Policy, #1: The results must help veterinarians and pet owners worldwide nutritionally enhance the well-being of cats and dogs. Iams promises to not mutilate animals or conduct non-essential research. Yet PETA's investigator saw lab techs repeatedly draw blood from dogs reserved for non-invasive metabolic studies. The blood was sold to other labs. A director ordered techs to cut dogs' vocal cords after he'd grown weary of their attention-seeking yelps. Iams did not halt unnecessary debarking.

Before PETA's exposition, the England-based group Uncaged combed science journals for Iams lab records. In 2001, the UK's Sunday Express ran a front-page story disclosing Iams-funded experiments on cats, dogs and other animals. Pet Food Cruelly Exposed: www.uncaged.co.uk/iamsexpress.htm

In response to allegations, Iams has pledged various reforms, such as consolidation of off-site testing within their Dayton facility (2006). PETA calls strategies to centralize over twice as many cats and dogs an example of Iams' "token gestures." At a 2004 Pet Food Forum, Iams' Dan Carey introduced an initiative to reward animals 30 minutes of exercise/socialization on weekdays. This leaves 23-1/2 hours cooped in a cage. Carey feels the half-hour breaks enable dogs and cats to spend their "entire lives" in labs.

Iams claims to supply toys, behavior training, group play and care. Long-term caging is renamed "Lifetim Destiny" and unadoptable dogs spend their golden years in a "retirement center." Some animals are reportedly adopted — but Iams won't release files on number of animals used, years of confinement, authenticity of adoptions, or existence of a retirement center. Moreover, Iams does not take responsibility for its leased animals. PETA asserts hundreds of beagles were left in "the same hideous conditions we found them in. Iams said they belonged to the [contract] laboratory."

Must some dogs and cats lead bleak lives so others can thrive? The American Association of Feed Control Officers (AAFCO) does not legally require manufacturers to experiment on animals to earn its seal of approval. To confirm this, PETA attended AAFCO meetings and acquired written verification from the Food and Drug Administration. Yet Iams routinely subsidizes tests for palatability, discovery phase, and metabolized energy. Hills Science Diet, Nestlé Purina/Friskies (Alpo, Proplan, Gourmet), Pedigree, Menu Foods (Petsmart Authority, Award, Safeway Select), and many more brands also fund animal experiments. Iams is one of the biggest, a present-setter for better or worse.

Pet-food producers are only obligated to reveal nutritional content, which can be evaluated through chemical analysis of ingredients as well as harmless in-home trials. Some companies collaborate with vet clinics in voluntary trials that use animals with preexisting conditions. Over 40 companion-animal food makers use humane testing methods.

According to PETA, Iams pursues animal experimentation more discreetly now. They may undercover a chair position at a university with nutritional trial labs or sponsor vivisection-related conferences. The Federal Trade Commission believes Iams' research policy, published on its website, may mislead consumers and violate "Section 5 of the FTC Act." In the UK, Iams is under investigation by the Advertising Standards Authority.

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