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Try to imagine responding to a routine call and finding yourself amidst a situation beyond what you've trained for. Suppose you stumble upon a potential hoarding case with hundreds of animals living inside a mobile home. Maybe you are responding to a domestic violence call and the victim doesn't want to provide a statement or cooperate with the investigation, but the family pet is displaying signs of abuse. You could even step over dog fighting paraphernalia on a scene and not even realize it.

These situations happen to law enforcement officers in jurisdictions across the country and have direct impact on the safety and welfare of a community. When animals are abused, people are at risk. When people are abused, animals are at risk. Recognizing animal abuse as an indicator that something is wrong in a household may be the first step in stopping the cycle of violence (Adams 2000). There is a great body of research showing the link between animal abuse and human interpersonal violence.

The purpose of this article is to provide deputies with information and resources to help you identify and combat these crimes. Animal cases can be both complicated and resource intensive. This is why the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Ani-

Who Can You Call for Help in Animal Cruelty Cases?



mals (ASPCA), the oldest animal welfare organization in the United States, created its Field Investigations and Response Team (FIR) in 2005. The investigations division spearheads our work with law enforcement at the local, state and federal levels with criminal cases involving animals. This team has the subject matter expertise in every phase of an investigation and is dedicated to assisting law enforcement. We have the resources and capacity to assist in the cultivation of probable cause, drafting of search and seizure warrants, arrest warrants, crime scene documentation, evidence collection, forensic analysis, animal handling and removal, animal sheltering and expert witness testimony.

Animal Neglect and Cruelty

Animal victims can be subjected to deliberate acts of cruelty such as torture, mutilation or intentional killing of the animal. Acts of cruelty are not limited to physical abuse, where animals are intentionally harmed. Neglect is another form of cruelty that can be

devastating. Neglected animals often do not have access to appropriate food and water, shelter and regular veterinary care that results in prolonged suffering and even death. How do you know if an animal may have been the victim of abuse or neglect? Below is a list of physical signs to look for:

- Collar is so tight that it has caused a neck wound or has become embedded in the pet's neck
- Open wounds, signs of multiple healed wounds or an ongoing injury or illness that isn't being treated
- Untreated skin conditions that have caused loss of hair, scaly skin, bumps or rashes
- Extreme thinness or emaciation—bones may be visible
- Fur infested with fleas, ticks or other parasites
- Patches of bumpy, scaly skin rashes
- Signs of inadequate grooming, such as extreme matting of fur, overgrown nails and dirty coat
- Weakness, limping or the inability to stand or walk normally
- Heavy discharge from eyes or nose
- An owner striking or otherwise physically abusing an animal
- Appears confused, disinterested or drowsy

Are there environmental signs to look for?

- Pets are tied up alone outside for

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long periods of time without adequate food or water, or with food or water that is unsanitary

- Pets are kept outside in inclement weather without access to adequate shelter
- Pets are kept in an area littered with feces, garbage, broken glass or other objects that could harm them
- Animals are housed in kennels or cages (very often crowded in with other animals) that are too small to allow them to stand, turn around and make normal movements possibly with too many other animals

Animal Fighting

Dog fighting and cock fighting is the pitting of animals of the same species, against one another and encouraging them to fight one another. "Blood sport," as it is often called, is intentional and organized abuse against animals that is typically associated with other crimes and occurs throughout the U.S. Animal fighting is illegal in all 50 states, and has been a federal crime since 2007. As the public becomes more aware of the heinous practice of dog fighting and other blood sports in the country, laws are tightening and reported cases are



on the rise. So what should law enforcement be on the lookout for? Below is a list of red flags for law enforcement that might indicate illegal animal fighting activity:

- Dogs with extensive injuries/scarring to the face and limbs
- Roosters with the combs and wattles (the fleshy appendages that hang at the top and bottom of the head) removed
- The presence of a disproportionately large number of male roosters compared to female hens on a property
- Several roosters housed in isolation from one another, or several dogs (primarily pit bulls) housed in isolation of one another

- The presence of a fighting pit, typically a wooden walled structure measuring between 14 and 20 square feet that is 24 to 36 inches high. The walls of a fighting pit are typically stained with blood.
- Presence of animal fighting paraphernalia such as: injectable supplements, dog treadmills, written training records, heavily weighted chains used to confine dogs to the ground, knives and gaffs used to attach to the legs of fighting roosters, animal fighting publications that list fights between animals and the sale of paraphernalia used in animal fighting
- Presence of other illegal activity such as narcotics possession, weapons charges, and violent crime



Animal Hoarding

Animal hoarders have far more animals than they are capable of caring for. Some hoarders get their start as rescue groups or sanctuaries and quickly become overwhelmed, and the animals in their care often go without food, shelter, sanitation and veterinary care. Animal hoarding is a complex and intricate issue with far-reaching effects that encompass mental health, animal welfare and public safety concerns.

With the recent attention given to the topic by national media outlets, communities have marveled at the unbelievable conditions hoarders create for themselves and animals. However, in order to effect positive change for all parties involved, communities must be proactive instead of reactive. Hoarders

often suffer from prolonged mental illness without appropriate treatment. Hoarders have a 100 percent recidivism rate without appropriate mental health intervention and often meet the criteria for the Baker Act. The time to think about how hoarding will impact your community isn't when the case is reported to the media. The following is a list of things first responders should look for in potential hoarding cases:

- Excessive accumulation of garbage and debris either inside or outside the home. Pet-related items often comprise the majority of the debris.
- Several animals in and around the residence. These animals may be running loose, confined to pens, or kept inside the residence.
- A significant portion of the subject's animals are in poor condition, either from illness/disease or injury.
- The animals involved in a hoarding case are typically intact and have the ability to reproduce. Hoarders typically do not spay/neuter their animals.
- The residence is in disrepair. The walls, ceiling, and floors are beginning to collapse.
- Excessive accumulation of feces and a concentrated smell of ammonia.
- The subject doesn't exercise good personal hygiene.
- The subject is socially isolated, and often refrains from socializing with those around them, including family.

Puppy Mills

Puppy mills are substandard breeding facilities where the health and well-being of the dogs is secondary to the profits made from the sale of their offspring. Often, puppy mill operators fail to apply proper husbandry practices that would remove sick dogs from their breeding pools and they produce puppies prone to congenital and hereditary defects.

Puppy mills are not defined by the number of animals. They can be as small as a backyard breeder or a



warehouse with over 1,000 dogs. The problem with puppy mills begins when the breeder puts profit over welfare. The breeder is primarily concerned with producing their product (puppies) and fails to provide minimum standards of nutrition, sanitation and veterinary care. Because veterinary care is often the most expensive cost in a breeding operation, puppy mill breeders concentrate their efforts toward producing more offspring and stop providing medical care for illness/disease and injury. It is important for law enforcement in the state of Florida to know that the seller of dogs and cats within the state must have an official certificate of veterinary inspection available to a consumer before, during and after the sale of that animal. For more information on this statute, reference F.S.S. 828.29. There are several warning signs that a puppy mill could be operating in your jurisdiction. These can include:

- Complaints from the public regarding the purchase of sick puppies.
- Presence of male and female dogs housed together that are not spayed/neutered.
- Presence of litters of puppies.
- Presence of advertisements offering puppies for sale.
- Dogs with untreated medical conditions. This can include injuries such as puncture wounds, lacerations, missing hair, crusty/scaly skin, discharge from the eyes/ears/nose, long toe nails, matted hair and missing/rotten teeth.
- Presence of excessive vomit or diarrhea in animal enclosures. This can be a sign of illness/disease.
- Accumulation of animal waste. Ani-

mal waste should not be allowed to accumulate in animal enclosures or in the area surrounding their enclosures.

- Presence of animals with no proof of veterinary care. Pets have to go to the vet, and puppy mill breeders often fail to provide veterinary care for the animals in their care.

What can your agency do now to prepare?

The ASPCA provides grant funding to law enforcement jurisdictions across the country to support their work in combating animal cruelty. These grants can be used to offset the costs incurred during animal cruelty cases, to support continuing education and skills training and to purchase equipment that can enhance and improve a jurisdiction's response to these criminal cases. The ASPCA is committed to supporting/enhancing the response to animal cruelty in communities across the country. If your department would like resources to build or support your divisions' cruelty investigations program, we invite you to apply for grant funding and check out the other resources designed for LE and prosecutors at the following web address: www.aspcapro.org

For more information or for assistance with cases, please contact Adam Leath, Regional Director with the Investigations Division at adam.leath@aspcapro.org or by cell at 917-828-5725.

References:

-- Kimberly J. Adams, ed., *Kentucky Children's Rights Journal* 8(2), Winter 2000