D4   Determination of Animal Law Enforcement's Capability to Conduct and Manage a Dog-Fighting Investigation and Recommendations for Identified Deficiencies

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about the origins of the blood sport termed dog fighting, learn that successful prosecution of these cases is important because commission of this felony crime has been proven to be a precursor to more serious crimes, understand the current status of animal law enforcement's capability to conduct and manage a dog fighting investigation, and be provided with creative recommendations for identified deficiencies in investigative practice and management of dog fighting cases that can be useful to animal law enforcement, animal care staff, and prosecutors.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing the importance of successful investigative practices and case presentation of the felony crime of dog fighting (animal cruelty). It is crucial that all law enforcement and animal sheltering agencies investigating these cases are knowledgeable and well trained in up-to- date forensic techniques in order to successfully prosecute these cases which could potentially prevent future progressive adult violence.

This paper answers the question, "How prepared is animal law enforcement to conduct and manage a dog-fighting investigation?" A Knowledge/Attitudes/Practices survey was developed and administered to national dog-fighting experts who have past experience working with animal law enforcement in the capacity of field investigators, specialty shelter veterinarians, and local prosecutors and ranked animal law enforcement's capability to conduct and manage a dog-fighting investigation. The survey questions explored three main areas: (1) preparation prior to crime scene investigation; (2) techniques of crime scene investigation; and, (3) post-investigation case management. Each area focused on specific practices and skill sets. Experts categorized these skill sets in a 1-5 ranking, with 1 indicating total competency in that area. The analysis of all expert responses revealed that animal law enforcement agencies have deficiencies in each of the three phases of the investigative process.

Research was conducted on the availability of advanced training and continuing education opportunities for animal law enforcement in

dog fighting investigative skills and case management. It was discovered that there were few opportunities for officers in this specialty. As a result of these findings, the most effective recommendation to improve investigative techniques performed by animal law enforcement in dog-fighting cases would be to develop and distribute a Dog-fighting Investigation Manual for Animal Law Enforcement as the training tool of choice. Supplemental to the manual, instructional videos should be created and used in training conferences that could be organized and scheduled throughout the country.

Survey findings also indicated that collaboration among agencies is a key factor to successful prosecution. With this in mind, the recommendation of a written manual and training conferences becomes even more effective when it is structured to integrate local law enforcement, animal care staff, veterinarians, and prosecutors.

At the end of the presentation, examples of the current progress of implementation of the recommendations will be shared with the attendees. Instructional videos in dog fighting investigation will be viewed in correlation with the investigative manual manuscript that is currently being reviewed for publication.

Dog, Fighting, Investigation