



D67 Categorical Analysis of Pennsylvania SPCA Humane Law Enforcement Animal Cruelty Cases: 2008-2011

Susan C. Underkoffler, MFS, 783 Cowpath Road, PO Box 26, Telford, PA 18969; and William Welsh, MS, Drexel University College of Medicine Master of Forensic Science Program, 245 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102*

After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the trends seen in cases investigated by Pennsylvania humane law enforcement officers over the course of several years. This will highlight animal crime as a subset of the overall crime statistics within Philadelphia and across Pennsylvania. It will show what types of animal crimes have demonstrated increases and decreases, and will therefore allow for future study into the connections of these crimes with additional ones, or reasons or explanations for the trends as they relate to accompanying crimes. Attendees will also be provided insights into the job responsibilities of a humane law enforcement officer within the state of Pennsylvania, some of their investigatory techniques including surveillance, and court appearances, and will also hear an overview of the state's animal-related laws.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as an example of anti-cruelty investigatory trends and by establishing a starting point for further study into the interdisciplinary aspects of animal cruelty and other crimes.

This study is an attempt to demonstrate trends in suspected animal cruelty cases investigated by the Pennsylvania SPCA's (PSPCA) humane law enforcement division both state-wide and in the city of Philadelphia from the years 2008 to 2011. The types of cases were evaluated categorically and include "unsanitary confinement," "lack of food/water/shelter," "lack of veterinary care," animal fighting," "abandonment," "commercial breeders," "stables," and "pet stores." The categories were then compiled graphically to provide visual illustrations regarding the numbers of cases investigated per year. In this way it was easy to see the prevalence of each category of cases within each year. However, it should be noted that the Pennsylvania areas (counties) served by PSPCA humane officers has changed drastically throughout the course of the study period due to budget constraints, and that the numbers may reflect these changes. PSPCA humane officers are authorized to carry weapons, obtain search or arrest warrants, issue citations, and make arrests for violations of Pennsylvania's anti-cruelty laws. They often work in conjunction with traditional law enforcement officers. There are ten PSPCA humane law enforcement officers working within Philadelphia (some are authorized to work in other counties as well), and two officers for the remainder of the state.

Investigations into cases of animal cruelty are more common nationwide now than in years past, due to increased public awareness and the resulting pressure from communities armed with more knowledge and a changing attitude toward animals. A growing enthusiasm for animal rights, as well as more research and literature related to animal welfare, and even popular reality television shows have helped shed light on what was once an underreported and often unacknowledged occurrence but is now a recognized crime. As awareness of animal abuse and aversion for it has grown, laws have evolved and expanded, resulting in harsher punishments for offenders. This in turn has prompted a greater need for forensic investigatory practices which may aid in successful prosecution.

Animal abuse has long been seen as a connection to other crimes and it is often a precursor to more severe offender behavior. Veterinary and wildlife forensics are new branches of forensic science that incorporate the applicability of science to animal laws. While the use of forensics in animal-related investigations is still in its infancy, it will continue to increase as the number of reported cases of animal cruelty and the resulting investigations grow. Further research is merited with regards to categories of cases not reported in this study but encountered with increasing frequency by PSPCA's humane officers, including hoarding and ear cropping.

Animal, Cruelty, Investigation