



### **D65 Four-Legged Victim or Violent Predator: Can Necropsies Aid in Court Cases?**

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The goal of this presentation is to provide insight into the legal ramifications and address the benefits of necropsies in criminal and civil cases. The forensic community, especially law enforcement, attorneys, and veterinarians, can appreciate the need for necropsies, not just for legal means, but for educational and training purposes. Attendees will be able to enhance their investigative knowledge and take back some alternatives in handling animals at crime scenes. Attendees can assist with implementing new policies, procedures, and specific training needed for law enforcement and first responders in order to prevent or reduce the number of animal shootings.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing definitions and will outline the number of animal deaths by law enforcement including audio and video footage of the shootings. The animal owners are painstakingly trying to figure out why their loved ones were, in their minds, unnecessarily shot. Police procedures and policies, as well as local and state laws, will be discussed. One or two unusual cases involving a necropsy of a goldfish and/or cockatoo and how this aided the court case will also be presented. Attendees will have the opportunity to look at various state laws already in existence regarding animals and their rights.

The world is changing and becoming more populated with different cultures, mores, and practices. Crime scenes are changing as well with people committing unimaginable acts of violence on other people and animals. Society has become private voyeurs with the increase in crime scene shows, YouTube® videos, and documentary-style programming like the ID channel's *Wives with Knives*, *Crime Scene Creatures*, Animal Planet®, and Oxygen® Channel's *Snapped*. The community is fascinated with law enforcement activities and appear to come running with video recorder in hand whenever they see police engaging in their daily duties.

The United States dog and cat population reached approximately 145 million in 2012, with about 56% of all United States households having a pet. Approximately 70 million households have dogs and 74.1 million households have cats. Birds, horses, specialty, and exotic pets are in about 17% of households. The types of scenes that the forensic community investigates are typically in residences, office buildings, on roadways, in vehicles, open fields, and inside containers. Most scenes involve only humans; however, increasingly family pets, specifically dogs and cats, are at the scene and need to be considered and managed during the investigation. Since 2010, approximately 228 dogs have been shot by law enforcement in the Houston area, resulting in the death of 142 dogs. Harris County is not the only area that has a problem with law enforcement shooting animals at scenes. There is a need for the forensic community to give animals the same respect and due diligence given to human remains, as these family pets may have grieving loved ones left behind.

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#### **Animals, Necropsy, Shooting**