



### W10 A Multidisciplinary Approach to Dogfighting Cases

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After attending this presentation, attendees will: (1) possess a basic understanding of dogfighting within the United States, including the breeds of dogs utilized, housing, breeding, training and conditioning of dogs, the rules and procedures of a fight, and recognition of paraphernalia associated with this crime; (2) be familiar with investigative techniques specific to dogfighting; (3) recognize the unique aspects of dogfighting crime scenes; (4) understand evidence analyses typically associated with dogfighting case work; (5) recognize the pattern of injury and animal behavior consistent with dogs utilized in organized dogfighting; (6) understand the link between dogfighting and other violent crimes; and, (7) better understand major legal issues in dogfighting investigations and prosecutions.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by enabling recognition of this clandestine crime and elucidating the most current research and techniques utilized when investigating and prosecuting dogfighting. Additionally, this presentation will illustrate the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach for the most favorable outcome to dogfighting criminal cases.

Organized dogfighting is intentional, severe abuse of animals. Although animal fighting is illegal in all 50 states and the federal Animal Welfare Act prohibits animal fighting ventures, this organized abuse of animals is still rampant throughout the United States and rarely occurs in isolation. Organized crimes, such as racketeering, illegal gambling, illicit drugs, and firearm offenses, are frequently associated with animal fighting.<sup>1-3</sup> Therefore, it is critical that law enforcement, veterinarians, prosecutors and others involved possess a basic understanding regarding the animals utilized, how they are maintained, trained and conditioned, fought, and the pattern of injuries and the behavior associated with these illegal fights.

In the United States, the American Pit Bull Terrier is the breed most commonly associated with organized dogfighting.<sup>1-4</sup> Dogfighting can be divided into three main categories: street fighting, hobbyist fighting, and higher level “professionals.”<sup>1,3,5</sup> Dogs are prepared for a fight in a fairly routine pattern; however, this varies depending on the category in which they fall. A wide array of equipment, techniques, supplements, and drugs are used to condition a dog for a fight. It is of the utmost importance that those involved in the investigation and prosecution of this crime be familiar with these items and information that may be inferred from them. Dogfighting crime scenes are unique and ideally involve a multidisciplinary approach that includes a variety of experts.

In addition to the items of physical evidence that might be encountered on the crime scene, it is important to remember that the animals themselves are also evidence and may have important information to be considered. Veterinarians involved in the examination of live and deceased animals should be familiar with the wound patterns characteristic of this activity. Fighting dogs typically display scars and/or wounds caused by the teeth of their opponent; however, typically, not all dogs in a dogfighting yard will have wounds and/or scars present, due to age and/or use.<sup>6</sup> The extent and distribution of wounds and/or scars can be very informative. Initial research has demonstrated that there is a distinct pattern of injury associated with organized dogfighting, which has been differentiated from spontaneous dogfights.<sup>6-7</sup> Additionally, underlying fractures or other skeletal trauma is not uncommon and should be documented through advanced imaging or skeletal analysis of remains.

Normal canine aggression is highly ritualized, but a fighting dog is more likely to rush directly at its opponent without hesitation, target vulnerable areas of the opponent’s body with deep-mouthed, hard bites, and continue to fight even if the opponent signals submission and defeat. Dogs seized in fighting cases should be systematically evaluated by experienced behavior specialists in order to document these unique behavioral characteristics, as this information can be used to support charges that the dogs were used for organized fighting.

Additionally, there are a variety of major legal issues involved in the investigation and prosecution of dogfighting, both at the state and federal level. Those involved in these areas should have a basic understanding of the issues at hand and how they may impact a case. This workshop will address the link between dogfighting and other crimes, provide attendees with a basic understanding of the animals utilized, how they are maintained, trained and conditioned, fought and the pattern of injuries and the behavior associated with these illegal fights as well as discuss major legal issues in dogfighting investigations and prosecutions.

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#### Dogfighting, Veterinary Forensic Science, Animal Cruelty