



B88 A Multidisciplinary Effort to Identify the Cat Killer of Silicon Valley

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Learning Overview: The goals and key educational objectives that will be highlighted in this presentation include: (1) criminalists working side by side with a veterinarian to identify, document, and collect various physical evidence; (2) the detection and forensic Short Tandem Repeat (STR) analysis of human DNA detected on the feline victims by the Santa Clara County Crime Laboratory Forensic Biology Unit; (3) efforts of the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory Forensic Unit at University of California, Davis to help determine how many different cats the suspect may be associated with harming; (4) screening/characterizing numerous reddish-brown stains that appeared to be non-human blood on various items collected from Robert Farmer's vehicle through presumptive blood testing and quantitative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR); and (5) legal aspects and challenges of animal cruelty cases.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating how a multidisciplinary team of criminalists (from various disciplines and forensic laboratories), veterinarians, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers can work together to navigate through the analysis of human and non-human physical evidence in animal cruelty cases.

People often regard their pets as "members of the family," so when numerous domestic cats were reported missing, and subsequently found mutilated and deceased during the months of September and October of 2015, residents of Silicon Valley's Cambrian Area were extremely concerned. A cat killer was on the loose and the number of feline victims was increasing. Given that many individuals who commit crimes against animals are likely to go on to commit crimes against humans, residents of this tight-knit community were rightfully concerned that this could be a serious public safety issue. The case erupted and gained significant media attention following the discovery by San Jose Police Department of a deceased cat in the center console of a vehicle owned by a man in the nearby area named Robert Farmer.

A multidisciplinary team consisting of criminalists (from various disciplines and forensic laboratories), veterinarians, prosecutors, and law enforcement each played invaluable roles in the evaluation of the numerous feline victims, as well as the human and non-human physical evidence that was seized and analyzed. The prosecuting attorney assigned to this case navigated through the complex legal intricacies of animal cruelty law (California Penal Code Section 597[a]) and worked closely with members of the community that were impacted.

In this case study presentation, members of the multidisciplinary team will highlight their efforts to evaluate and analyze the feline victims and the physical evidence that was crucial to linking suspect Robert Farmer to many more victims than was originally anticipated. Some of the key factors that will be highlighted include: (1) criminalists working side by side with a veterinarian to identify, document, and collect various physical evidence; (2) detection and forensic STR analysis of human DNA detected on the feline victims by the Santa Clara County Crime Laboratory Forensic Biology Unit; (3) efforts of the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory Forensic Unit at University of California, Davis to help determine how many different cats the suspect may be associated with injuring or killing; (4) screening/characterizing numerous reddish-brown stains that appeared to be non-human blood on various items collected from Robert Farmer's vehicle through presumptive blood testing and quantitative PCR; and (5) legal aspects and challenges of animal cruelty cases.

The team approach taken proved to be a huge success in providing answers to key case questions and resulted in an increase in the number of counts against Farmer and will be relied upon for future cases of animal cruelty in Santa Clara County.

Animal Cruelty, Cat Killer, Serial Cat Killer