



GERMAN SHEPHERD RESOURCE AND RESCUE CENTER

HUMANE EDUCATION PROGRAM

UNDERSTANDING AND REPORTING ANIMAL CRUELTY

DEFINING ANIMAL CRUELTY

Animal cruelty laws vary state by state, in the types of animals covered by such statutes, and whether violations constitute a felony or a misdemeanor which fails to lend a consistent definition of what constitutes animal cruelty. U.S. Legal, Inc. provides a legal definition of animal cruelty which defines the term as “acts of violence or neglect perpetrated against animals.”

This can be further divided into two main categories: neglect (e.g., companion animals being neglected or denied basic necessities of care such as food, water, shelter, or veterinary care) and intentional cruelty (e.g., overt abuse, the purposeful infliction of physical harm or injury on an animal, dog fighting and cock fighting).

Other examples of these categories include the torture of an animal, deprivation of necessary sustenance, unnecessarily or cruelly beat, needlessly mutilate or kill, or impound or confine an animal without supplying it during such confinement with a sufficient quantity of good wholesome food and water, impound or confine an animal without affording it shelter from wind, rain, snow, or excessive direct sunlight, and carry or convey an animal in a cruel or inhuman manner.

In an effort to also try and understand the reasons why individuals abuse animals, Pet-Abuse.com breaks the term down into two main categories: active (acts of commission) and passive (acts of omission).

PASSIVE CRUELTY

Passive cruelty is typified by cases of neglect, where the crime is a lack of action rather than the action itself and includes examples such as starvation, dehydration, parasite infestations, allowing a collar to grow into an animal's skin, inadequate shelter in extreme weather conditions, and failure to seek veterinary care when an animal needs medical attention. This website also provides a handout of The Body Condition System, a system developed by Purina, to help judge if a pet's appearance is normal or not.

ACTIVE CRUELTY

Active cruelty implies malicious intent, where a person has deliberately and intentionally caused harm to an animal and is sometimes referred to as NAI (Non-Accidently Injury) and includes animal fighting, hoarding, poisoning, shooting, bestiality, and crush videos. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) also includes in this category on-line cruelty or Internet Hunting, which may also be referred to as

Remote-Controlled or Computer Assisted Hunting, which combines video shooting games with the power of Internet technology to allow a remote computer user to kill real animals.

Identifying Animal Cruelty

Recognizing animal cruelty is not always as easy as it seems and the ASPCA suggests that the best way to tell whether a pet is being or has been abused is to examine him and his surrounding environment.

The following is a list of signs that may alert you that an animal needs help:

Physical Signs

- Collar so tight that it has caused a neck wound or has become embedded in the pet's neck
- Open wounds, signs of multiple healed wounds or an ongoing injury or illness that isn't being treated
- Untreated skin conditions that have caused loss of hair, scaly skin, bumps or rashes
- Extreme thinness or emaciation—bones may be visible
- Fur infested with fleas, ticks or other parasites
- Patches of bumpy, scaly skin rashes
- Signs of inadequate grooming, such as extreme matting of fur, overgrown nails and dirty coat
- Weakness, limping or the inability to stand or walk normally
- Heavy discharge from eyes or nose
- An owner striking or otherwise physically abusing an animal
- Visible signs of confusion or extreme drowsiness

Environmental Signs

- Pets are tied up alone outside for long periods of time without adequate food or water, or with food or water that is unsanitary
- Pets are kept outside in inclement weather without access to adequate shelter
- Pets are kept in an area littered with feces, garbage, broken glass or other objects that could harm them
- Animals are housed in kennels or cages (very often crowded in with other animals) that are too small to allow them to stand, turn around and make normal movements possibly with too many other animals

WHAT CAN YOU DO AND HOW TO REPORT ANIMAL CRUELTY

You only have to suspect that an animal has being neglected or mistreated to report it. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) suggests that you contact your local humane society (e.g., if you live in MA you may contact Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) Law Enforcement at (617) 522-6008 or (800) 628-5808), animal shelter, or [animal control agency](#) and present your complaint and evidence. Provide them with the details you've gathered. Contact local police and social services departments and again provide them with the details and let them know that you have already notified your animal control officer.

The ASPCA suggests gathering the following information before submitting a report of animal cruelty:

- A concise, written, factual statement of what you observed—giving dates and approximate times whenever possible—to provide to law enforcement.
- Photographs of the location, the animals in question and the surrounding area. However, please do not put yourself in danger! Do not enter another person's property without permission, and exercise great caution around unfamiliar animals who may be frightened or in pain.
- If you can, provide law enforcement with the names and contact information of other people who have firsthand information about the abusive situation.

To find out if there is an agency other than the police authorized to conduct cruelty investigations in your area, you can also visit the ASPCA's state-by-state list of anti-cruelty investigatory-arrest powers. This site also provides an online database with more than 550 animal cruelty laws, and their penalties, from all 50 states. This database, maintained by the ASPCA Government Affairs and Public Policy department, is an extensive resource for providing information relating to animal cruelty laws.

RESOURCES

U.S. Legal, Inc. (1997). Legal Definitions. Animal Cruelty Law & Legal Definition. Retrieved January 28, 2010 from <http://definitions.uslegal.com/a/animal-cruelty/>

Pet-Abuse.Com (2010). Animal Cruelty. Retrieved December 7, 2009 from http://www.pet-abuse.com/pages/animal_cruelty.php

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
www.aspca.org/

Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
www.mspca.org/

Humane Society of the United States
www.humanesociety.org/

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