

Animal Cruelty/Neglect FAQ

What Constitutes Animal Cruelty or Neglect?

Animal cruelty occurs when someone intentionally injures or harms an animal or when a person willfully deprives an animal of food, water or necessary medical care. Here are some signs that may indicate abuse or neglect:

- Tick or flea infestations
- Wounds on the body
- Patches of missing fur
- Matted fur
- Extremely thin, starving animal
- Dehydration
- Limping
- Imbedded collars
- Heat stroke or hyperthermia
- An owner striking or otherwise physically abusing an animal
- Dogs who are repeatedly left alone without food and water, and often chained in a yard
- Dogs who have been hit by cars—or are showing any of the signs listed here—and have not been taken to a veterinarian
- Dogs who are kept outside without shelter in extreme weather conditions
- Animals who cower in fear or act aggressively when approached by their owners
- Dog fighting
- Animals left in hot vehicles

Will Someone Who is Found Guilty of Animal Cruelty Go to Jail?

Some will and some will not—the penalties for animal cruelty vary widely from state to state, and they also depend on the exact charges, the heinousness of the crime and on the perpetrator's criminal record.

Felonies almost always carry stronger penalties than misdemeanors, which rarely involve a jail sentence. Whether a particular criminal act is considered a felony or a misdemeanor can vary from state to state, and the federal government has its own definitions as well.

Sometimes, repetition of a misdemeanor-level crime can lead to a felony-level charge—meaning that a subsequent offense of a crime a person has been convicted of in the past will be considered a felony, and not a misdemeanor. This is not true of all laws, however, or of all states.

Are Websites Depicting Animal Cruelty Illegal?

The Internet delivers an astounding array of images and ideas into homes across the world. But not all of these images are particularly animal-friendly. In fact, some of what is being sold and shown online crosses into the realm of criminal activity. And in some cases, there are laws against showing and selling these images.

To report websites that display acts of cruelty to animals, please contact the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

Are Veterinarians Obligated by Law to Report Suspicions That an Animal Patient is a Victim of Cruelty at Home?

YES! In the state of Illinois, Veterinarians are mandated reporters.

How do I Report Animal Cruelty?

Try to gather 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.

Remember, never give away a document without making a copy for yourself!

Can I Remain Anonymous When I File a Complaint About Animal Cruelty?

Yes, you can, and it is better to file an anonymous report than to do nothing—but please consider providing your information. The case is more likely to be pursued when there are credible witnesses willing to stand behind the report and, if necessary, testify in court about what they may have witnessed.

If I Report My Suspicions That a Neighbor is Committing Animal Cruelty, and That Person's Animal is Taken Away and Put in a Shelter, Isn't The Animal Worse Off?

It's important to understand that reporting cruelty is always the right thing to do. Because of the burden it places on the system, animal control officers do not want to remove an animal from a home unless absolutely necessary. If an animal is taken from his or her owner, there was a substantial problem. A seized animal will have the chance to get the necessary help, whether that help is nutritional, medical or behavioral. Also, if an intervention by law enforcement leads to a conviction, you may inadvertently have helped spare other animals from the same abuse: in many states, convicted animal abusers are barred from owning pets.

How Should I Follow up on My Report of Animal Cruelty?

When you report animal cruelty, it's a good idea to keep a careful record of exactly whom you contacted, the date of the contacts, copies of any documents you provided to law enforcement or animal control, and the content and outcome of your discussion. This will make following up much easier.

If you do not receive a response from the officer assigned to your case within a reasonable length of time, make a polite follow-up call to inquire about the progress of the investigation.

Please keep in mind that most law enforcement agencies operate with limited personnel and resources. Most of these agencies are doing their best to conduct timely and efficient investigations. Being

respectful of the challenges they face. Giving them the benefit of the doubt when appropriate will likely get you much further than premature complaints to their superiors

Where Do You Report Animal Cruelty??

In the City of Urbana you should call the non-emergency number, 217-333-8911.

In Other Areas

Find out who is responsible for investigating and enforcing the anti-cruelty codes in your town, county and/or state. These people typically work for your local humane organization, animal control agency, taxpayer-funded animal shelter or police precinct.