

Factsheet

What to Do If You Spot Animal Abuse

You've seen an animal being abused and want to do something to stop it, but you don't know what to do. Here are a few steps to help you with a cruelty investigation.

■ Where to Start

First, find out who in your town, county, or state investigates and enforces the anti-cruelty codes. Often, these people work for local humane societies, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals (SPCAs), or taxpayer-funded animal shelters.

If you cannot locate the proper person, call or visit your local sheriff's office or police department to ask for help in enforcing the law. Before doing so, check the county and state law books in your local library. The state statute and county code will tell you exactly what a person is prohibited from doing to an animal. You can look up the laws easily in the index of the books and should make a photocopy to take with you. In most states, causing an animal "unnecessary suffering" is illegal, as is beating an animal, depriving him or her of food, and so on.

■ Gathering Evidence

Once you have located the proper law enforcement officer, provide him or her with a concise, written, factual statement of what you have observed, giving dates and approximate times. If you can, photograph the situation and date your photographs. You should also try to get short, factual, written statements from other witnesses.

Always keep a record of whom you contact, the date of the contacts, and the content and outcome of your discussions with each of them. Never give away a letter or document without making a copy for your file. Make it crystal clear that you wish to pursue this case and are willing to lend your assistance, as required.

■ Pursuing Your Case

If you are not able to get satisfaction from the law enforcement officers, present your documented case to their supervisors and, if necessary, to your local government officials, such as the county commissioner, and ask them to act. If you have witnessed the cruel act yourself, you can go to your local police commissioner and ask to swear out a warrant to summon the accused person to court. Sometimes expert witnesses may be necessary to the case. A veterinarian, for example, can sign a statement that it is his or her "expert opinion" that a dog suffers if swung by a chain, deprived of food, etc. Expert opinions often make or break a case, so if you know a sympathetic veterinarian, you may wish to seek his or her assistance and tell the officer that you have expert support.

By keeping a factual, well-documented, step-by-step record of the case, if all else fails you can always visit or call your local newspaper offices or television stations and try to interest reporters in the story. A news story may force officials to act or scare the person causing the abuse into stopping. Other people who have seen similar acts may then be encouraged to step forward.

■ Calling Us for Help

Please feel free to contact PETA's Domestic Animal Issues & Abuse Department for further assistance if you get stuck. We know investigations can be difficult and sometimes discouraging. But the animals are depending on you to follow through. You can make all the difference in the world for them.

We wish you success in your efforts!