



EDITOR'S NOTE

The growth of veterinary forensics: investigation of deceased animals in the community

Veterinary forensics is a rapidly growing field, and it is recognized that there is a connection between animal abuse and other types of interpersonal violence (Lockwood and Arkow 2016). While all states have misdemeanor and felony statutes for animal abuse, unfortunately, not all cases of animal abuse are reported to the authorities or investigated for a multitude of reasons. Some of these reasons include the lack of mandatory reporting laws in all states, an inability to perform a forensic postmortem examination in all suspicious death cases, lack of training on the identification and documentation of suspected animal abuse, and financial constraints. While it is possible to mitigate some limitations on the local level in some communities, much improvement is needed on the state and national scale.

As previously stated, financial constraints are often a deterrent limiting forensic investigations of animals, especially when there is no known suspect, the animal victim is found deceased, or it is unknown if a crime has even occurred. While it is not uncommon to find a deceased “stray” animal in the community, unlike finding a deceased human, a death investigation of the animal is not typically performed. The animal’s body is often collected and disposed of by a public works department.

Fortunately, several U.S.-based programs are at the forefront of veterinary forensic investigations that involve community dogs and cats. Two of these programs, A Dog Has No Name and A Cat Has No Name (ADHNN and ACHNN, respectively; linked at cdpm.vetmed.ufl.edu/research/forensic-pathology), are based in Florida; and The Animal Doe Project (vetinvestigator.com/animaldoeproject), in Massachusetts. These programs investigate the deaths of animals found dead in the community and are provided at no cost to the submitter. In addition to the examination of deceased animals, The Animal Doe Project also examines live injured animals. Many deaths of the animals submitted in the ADHNN and ACHNN programs are due to natural disease or accidental trauma; however, there are cases where the animal was a victim of abuse who succumbed to injuries. When incidents

such as these are identified, they are reported to the appropriate jurisdictional agency. Additionally, multiple animals that died due to natural disease were found to have been deliberately dumped in the community, for which the dumping alone is often a misdemeanor. It is important to note that dumped deceased animals pose a risk to other animals and people, especially if an infectious or zoonotic disease is involved. Ultimately, all three programs have allowed for the identification of animal abuse, but unfortunately, countless others are missed across the county where no investigation will be performed.

As veterinary forensics continues to grow, we should expect an increasing number of training opportunities, scientific publications, and forensic services available to veterinary and law enforcement communities. Beyond this editorial scope, there are many different resources available to the reader about animal protection laws at the state and global levels, such as the Animal Legal & Historical Center at Michigan State University (animallaw.info/content/state-animal-anti-cruelty-laws) and the Global Animal Law Association (globalanimallaw.org). Professional organizations, such as the International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association (ivfsa.org), can be valuable resources. In the current issue of the Journal of Veterinary Forensic Sciences, we have an article highlighting the growth of veterinary forensics in Chile, written by Drs Geraldo and Arias (2020).

I look forward to substantial growth in the field of veterinary forensics and how the Journal of Veterinary Forensic Sciences will contribute to that growth.

—Adam W Stern, co-editor

References

- Lockwood R, Arkow P. 2016. Animal abuse and interpersonal violence: the cruelty connection and its implications for veterinary pathology. *Vet Pathol.* 53(5):910–8. doi:[10.1177/0300985815626575](https://doi.org/10.1177/0300985815626575).
- Geraldo E, Arias F. 2020. Forensic veterinary medicine in Chile: a professional examination. *J Vet Forensic Sci.* 1(2).