

Quick Facts:

Why is The Link important for... Law Enforcement?



Animal cruelty is a crime.

- The United States has the oldest laws in the world preventing cruelty to animals (dating to the Colonial era of 1641). (Animal Welfare Institute, 1990) All U.S. jurisdictions have prohibitions against animal maltreatment, and over 42 states declare some forms of animal abuse to be felonies.

Research demonstrates a correlation between acts of animal cruelty and other criminal activities.

- An important part of the Chicago Police Department's anti-violence strategy includes strict enforcement of dogfighting statutes: their research has found direct connections between the violent world of dogfighters, gangs, drugs and weapons. Research revealed that 35% of search warrants executed for animal abuse or dogfighting resulted in seizures of narcotics and/or weapons: 82% of offenders arrested for animal abuse violations had priors for battery, weapons offenses or drugs, and 23% had subsequent arrests for felony offenses. (Chicago Crime Commission, 2004)
- In one study, 70% of animal abusers in Massachusetts also had records for crimes of violence, drugs or social disorder. (Arluke & Luke, 1997)
- In Sydney, Australia, police researchers have determined that animal abuse is a better predictor of sexual assault than are previous convictions for homicide, arson or weapons offenses. Animal cruelty offenders average four different types of criminal offenses, and 100% of sexual homicide offenders reported having been cruel to animals. A report concluded that offender profiling for homicide, sexual assault, arson, stalking and child abuse would benefit greatly from law enforcement having more information about animal cruelty. (Gullone & Clarke, 2005)
- In Winnipeg, Canada, a police department review of national crime records found that 70% of people charged with cruelty to animals also had other reported incidents of violent behavior – including homicide. (Boat & Knight, 2000)

“We must, as prosecutors, recognize that it is unacceptable to excuse and ignore acts of cruelty toward animals. Anyone who can commit such cruelty is in desperate need of incarceration.” -- *A. William Ritter, Jr., District Attorney, Denver, Colo.* (Ritter, 1996)

Animal abuse is also a serious human issue.

- The International Association of Chiefs of Police wrote, “Over the last decade, social scientists and law enforcement agencies have begun to examine cruelty to animals as a serious human problem closely linked to domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent crimes. [Link efforts] cannot undo generations of abuse, but they can be an effective means of breaking the cycle of family violence from one generation to the next.” (Lockwood, 2000)

Animal abuse inflicts pain and suffering on victims.

- In addition to the physical pain and suffering experienced by the animal victims, there is emotional pain experienced by the human family members.

Animal abuse can expose other forms of family violence.

- Evidence is mounting that animals are harmed or threatened as pawns in games of power and control exercised by perpetrators of domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and elder abuse. Psychological research has confirmed centuries of conventional wisdom that when children harm animals it is often a “red flag,” a diagnostic marker of a disturbed individual whose acts of violence will escalate in range and severity.
- Children who witness animal abuse and cruelty are at a greater risk of becoming abusers themselves and of perpetuating the cycles of family violence. Animal abuse rarely occurs in isolation. Often, it is just one form of family violence occurring in the home.
- Because neglected or maltreated animals may be exposed in plain view where concerned neighbors may see or hear them and make a report, humane society or SPCA agents, animal control officers, dog wardens or rabies control officers may be the first point of social services contact and intervention for a family in crisis.

Animal abuse is often an indicator that children pose a risk to themselves and to others.

- Such organizations as the National School Safety Council, the U.S. Department of Education, the American Psychological Association, the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, and the National Crime Prevention Council have reported that children who harm animals are at greater risk of becoming violent to others.
- Numerous studies of aggressive criminals and prison inmates have found many incidents of severe cruelty to animals in their childhoods, acts that were often excused as “boys will be boys” or “it was only a cat,” without realizing the diagnostic significance of these actions. In looking at threat assessments, the FBI’s behavioral science profilers are surprised when animal abuse does not show up in the histories of serial rapists and murderers.
- Animal abuse often begins early in childhood (as young as 6.5 years), providing opportunities for timely, more effective preventions. Many little boys in abusive homes are at risk of becoming abusers; even more little girls are at risk of becoming victims. (Ascione, 2001)

The Unique and Critical Roles of Police in Animal Cruelty and Other Forms of Family Violence

1. A police investigation can lead to the identification of other family crises.

Even if an investigation of suspected animal abuse, maltreatment or neglect proves unfounded or a case cannot be prosecuted, police involvement may uncover other issues and a family in need of referrals to appropriate social service agencies.

2. Police investigators can skillfully ask questions to uncover patterns of violence or control.

Victims and witnesses to family violence are often reluctant to talk to strangers or authority figures about the incidents, and frequently make apologies for the behavior of the perpetrator. But people love to talk about their pets. A skilled investigator can get a victim or witness to talk openly by initiating a discussion about the animals in the household, and use this information to uncover patterns of violence and control which can better inform the complete investigation.

3. The implementation of screening protocols within police departments can lead to violence reduction.

Several years ago, police officials in Nashville, Tenn., initiated a new screening process for all domestic violence calls, to ask whether the batterer had a weapon, had threatened suicide, or had abused family pets. Abusers with any of these characteristics were referred to special intervention programs. Within one year, Nashville’s domestic violence homicide rate decreased 80%. (Boat & Knight, 2000)

4. Police have the power to make a difference for animals and families.

By treating animal abuse as a serious issue, law enforcement officers can stop bad behavior before the perpetrator becomes desensitized to violence and disrespect for the law. Early intervention can prevent others from being at risk.

Resources for Law Enforcement

- **In the Line of Duty** (<http://www.lineofduty.com>) produces video training tapes for law enforcement agencies. Among their video productions are:
 - “Animal Abuse: Why Cops Can, and Need to Stop It”
 - “Pit Bulls and Dogfighting”
 - “What Dogs Try to Tell Cops”
- The **Chicago Crime Commission** (<http://www.chicagocrimecommission.org>) has partnered with the Cook County State Attorney’s Office to create the RAV2 program – “Reduce Animal Violence, Reduce All Violence” – based upon the connections between violence toward humans and violence toward animals.
- The Boston Police Department, in partnership with the New England Animal Control/Humane Task Force, started LINK-UP in 1995 to detect and intervene in cases of domestic violence. LINK-UP educates officers and first responders about the connections between animal abuse and domestic violence, and to respond to animal abuse reports with an eye to looking into further violence in the home. Animal Control notifies police officers when severe cases of animal abuse or neglect are confirmed: officers make home visits to assess the situation and bring domestic violence literature with them. The program was expanded in 2001 to involve 40 professionals from criminal justice and social service agencies who discuss the Link and mobilize their peers to intervene. For details, see the **National Crime Prevention Council’s Strategy Sheet: Screening Animal Cruelty Cases for Domestic Violence** (http://ncpc.org/topics/Personal_Safety/Strategy_Screening_Animal_Cruelty_Cases_for_Domestic_Violence.php)
- The Colorado Springs, Colo., Police Department was instrumental in organizing **DVERT – Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team** and in securing federal grant dollars to implement a multi-agency, collaborative response to domestic violence that includes the Humane Society and a recognition of the Link. More than 35 law enforcement, criminal justice, women’s services and educational agencies participate in this model program. See details at <http://www.dvert.org>.

What Can You Do?

- Take reports of animal cruelty seriously. Animal abuse is a crime and animal investigations often uncover other serious crimes.
- Be familiar with anti-cruelty laws in your jurisdiction.
- Get to know the animal protection personnel in your region and work with them. Establish collaborative protocols between your agencies.
- Establish lines of communication with these agencies so when your work uncovers family violence you are prepared to make a report or referral as needed.
- Be aware of the psychological importance of pets in the lives of families.
- Invite officials from child protection, animal protection, adult protection, and domestic violence agencies to provide training for your staff on how to recognize and report various forms of family violence.

- Maintain a list of all community agencies that provide services and resources for victims of child abuse, animal abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse. Make this list available as handouts for field officers and as flyers in your offices.
- Invite animal care and control organizations to serve on community crime prevention commissions and family violence councils.
- Sponsor a workshop to educate your colleagues, either locally, regionally, statewide or nationally, on The Link. American Humane has a speakers' bureau to provide these presentations.

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