



Reporting Animal Abuse or Neglect



What should I do if I witness an animal being mistreated?

If you witness **animal abuse or neglect**, please contact your local humane society, animal shelter, or animal control agency immediately. In most areas, those agencies have the authority to enforce state and local laws related to animals and the capability to investigate and resolve these situations. They rely on concerned citizens to be their eyes and ears in the community and to report animal suffering. You can choose to remain anonymous, although giving your name to your humane agency will enable that group to follow up with you when necessary.

These dedicated agencies have the important job of ensuring that animals in their jurisdiction receive proper food, water, and shelter, and are protected from abandonment and cruel treatment. The prevention of cruelty to animals represents the core mission of many local animal care organizations. Investigation requests can come from members of the community or other law enforcement agencies.

How are complaints investigated?

While the exact process may vary depending on the local laws and procedures, an officer will look into the complaint to see if animal cruelty statutes have been violated. If in fact a violation has occurred, the officer may speak with the owner and issue a citation and give the owner a chance to correct the violation.

The majority of cruelty complaints stem from simple neglect of the animal, rather than deliberate abuse. The humane officer's biggest role is as an educator—informing well-meaning, but unknowledgeable, pet owners of the proper care of their pets.

In rare cases, animal neglect or abuse may be extreme and require immediate intervention. Depending on the circumstances, the animals may be removed from the situation by the humane agency to protect them from further harm. The agency will present the case to the prosecutor's office for further evaluation and possible prosecution. Some agencies have the power to obtain and serve warrants; other agencies work closely with local police who execute the search warrant on their behalf.

What happens to the pet owner and the animals in these cases?

State and local laws are written to protect the individuals being prosecuted as well as the animals involved. Such laws also determine how long the animals must be housed at the animal shelter while a case is being processed by the court system. Caring for animals seized in a cruelty case can be an expensive and time-consuming effort. When animals must be housed at the shelter for long periods of time while a case is being processed, it can create stress for both the animals and the staff.

With the best interests of the animals in mind, many states have established civil procedures to allow the agency to petition the general district court in the city or county where the animals were seized for a hearing to expedite custody of the animals to the agency. This type of process prevents a long stay at the shelter for the animals involved while waiting for resolution to the trial, and allows them to be adopted to new, safe homes or humanely euthanized if they are suffering or unsuitable for adoption.

How can I find my local animal care and control agency?

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You can find the name and number of your local humane society or animal control agency by looking in your phone book's yellow pages under "animal shelter," "humane society," or "animal control," or by calling Information. Often, public animal care and control agencies are also listed under the city or county health department or police department.

You can also find contact information for animal shelters, animal control agencies, and other animal care organizations in your community through web sites like www.Petfinder.com and www.Pets911.com. If there is not a shelter or animal control agency in your community, please report any incident to your police department immediately.

What role does The HSUS play in local animal abuse and neglect cases?

The Humane Society of the United States does not have animal control capabilities; that is a function of local animal control programs. The HSUS is neither legally nor contractually affiliated with—nor is a parent organization for—local humane societies, animal shelters, or animal care and control agencies. In short, The HSUS does not operate or have direct control over any animal shelter.

The HSUS does, however, **provide assistance and resources** to animal shelters and animal control professionals around the country. We serve as a resource for local animal protection organizations by providing them with educational materials, training opportunities, recommended operations guidelines, and other expertise. And, of course, we conduct large-scale, national investigations covering a host of animal issues.

If you would like more information on animal abuse and what you can do to strengthen animal cruelty laws in your state, please contact us at 2100 L Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20037-1598; 202-452-1100 or check out The HSUS's **First Strike campaign**.

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