

# *What Law Enforcers Need to Know*



*The First Strike®  
campaign was  
developed by  
The Humane Society  
of the United States  
(HSUS) to increase  
public awareness  
of the connection  
between animal  
cruelty and  
human violence.*



## *What is animal cruelty?*

Animal cruelty encompasses a range of behaviors harmful to animals, from neglect to malicious killing. Most cruelty investigated by humane officers is unintentional neglect that can be resolved through education. *Intentional* cruelty, or abuse, is knowingly depriving an animal of food, water, shelter, socialization, or veterinary care or maliciously torturing, maiming, mutilating, or killing an animal.

## *Why is it a concern?*

Animal cruelty can be one of the earliest and most dramatic indicators that an individual is developing a pattern of seeking power and control by inflicting suffering on others.

## *Is there any evidence of a connection between animal cruelty and human violence?*

Absolutely. Many studies in psychology, sociology, and criminology during the last 25 years have demonstrated that violent offenders frequently have childhood and adolescent histories of serious and repeated animal cruelty. The FBI has recognized the connection since the 1970s, when bureau analysis of the life histories of imprisoned serial killers suggested that most, as children, had killed or tortured animals. Other research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of more common forms of violence, including child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse.

## *How do law enforcement agencies use this evidence?*

The FBI identifies animal cruelty as one of a cluster of juvenile behaviors associated with increasingly violent behavior and uses animal cruelty in analyzing the threat potential of suspected and known criminals.

## *Who abuses animals?*

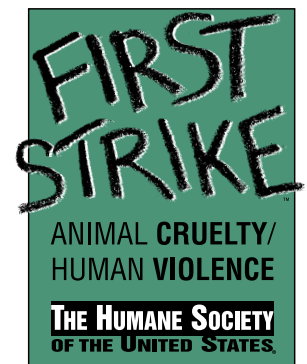
Most animal abusers are adolescent or young adult males, although children as young as four have been known to harm animals. Many animal abusers have a history of other antisocial or criminal activities, including vandalism, assault, and arson, and many are the victims of physical or sexual abuse. Animal cruelty is often associated with children who do poorly in school and have low self-esteem and few friends.

## *Why would anyone abuse animals?*

There can be many reasons. Animal cruelty, like any other form of violence, is often committed by a person who feels powerless, unnoticed, and under the control of others. The motive may be to shock, threaten, intimidate, or offend others or to demonstrate rejection of society's rules. Some who are cruel to animals copy things they have seen or that have been done to them. Others see harming an animal as a safe way to get revenge on someone who cares about that animal. In some cases, animal abuse is associated with deviant arousal.

## *Are other violent behaviors associated with animal cruelty?*

Recent studies have identified connections between animal cruelty and many different forms of family and societal violence. A 1983 survey of 57 pet-owning families under treatment by New Jersey's Division of Youth and Family Services for child abuse revealed that in 88 percent of the



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families at least one person had abused animals. In two-thirds of those cases, the abusive parent had injured or killed a pet; in the remaining cases, children were the animal abusers. Several surveys of women seeking protection from domestic violence report that up to 70 percent of the women with pets indicated that their pets had been threatened, hurt, or killed by their abusive partners.

Patrol officers should be aware that pets are often the first victims of family or neighborhood disputes that escalate into violent and even fatal encounters between people. Intervention at an early stage might prevent these conflicts from becoming more serious.

### *Is animal cruelty recognized as a sign of mental disorder?*

Yes. In the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, the American Psychiatric Association lists animal cruelty as one of the behaviors signaling conduct disorder. Clinical evidence indicates that animal cruelty is one of the symptoms usually seen at the earliest stages of conduct disorder, often by the age of eight. This information has only recently been included in the *DSM-IV*, so some psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers are just now becoming aware of it.

**Violence is often committed by a person who feels powerless, unnoticed, and under the control of others.**

### *Why is it important to stop animal abusers when they are young?*

A 1994 report released by the National Research Council states that early intervention is more likely to reduce adult crime than criminal sanctions applied later in life. The report further states that childhood behavior is more important than teenage behavior in predicting future violence.

### *What can be done to prevent young animal abusers from developing into violent adults?*

Crimes against animals are not isolated events. FBI experts advise all appropriate agencies to share case information with one another. A comprehensive approach—with cooperation from the family, support from the school, and counseling by a psychologist or social worker—is essential.

### *How can law enforcement officers and humane investigators work together?*

Upholding anticruelty laws is usually the responsibility of local police, although in some communities, humane investigators have law enforcement powers. Law enforcement officers should be thoroughly familiar with anticruelty laws. They should get to know local humane investigators, who may be aware of potentially violent situations that have not come to the attention of the police. Humane investigators may also be able to provide helpful information relevant to ongoing investigations. Other important contacts for law enforcement officers include schoolteachers, child welfare professionals, crisis intervention teams, family shelter personnel, social workers, and veterinarians.

### *Is animal cruelty a crime?*

Yes. Anticruelty laws exist in all states. In many states animal cruelty is a felony offense under certain circumstances.

### *What is the key to prosecuting an animal cruelty case successfully?*

Preparing an animal cruelty case is similar to preparing any case of criminal violence.

The testimony of an identifiable witness and expert testimony addressing the nature of the injury and the physical condition of the animal are vital.

Contact The HSUS for information on professionals who can provide expert testimony.



**Pets are often the first victims of family or neighborhood disputes that escalate into violent encounters.**

To learn more about the First Strike campaign, call toll free 1-888-213-0956, e-mail [firststrike@hsus.org](mailto:firststrike@hsus.org), visit [www.hsus.org/firststrike](http://www.hsus.org/firststrike), or write to us at the address below. The HSUS was founded as a nonprofit organization in 1954 to protect animals through legal, educational, legislative, and investigative means. The HSUS has 10 regional offices throughout the country and operates outside The United States as Humane Society International.

**Promoting the protection of all animals**

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