

The Links Between Animal Cruelty, Terrorism and Violence: What You Can Do About It

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There is no doubt a link exists between animal cruelty and other types of crime. Paying attention to animal cruelty crime, a NIBRS reportable offense, offers law enforcement an important tool for investigation and prosecution. Most people are familiar with the number of serial killers who initiated their cruel acts toward animals—Albert DeSalvo, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Ted Bundy were a few. Some of their names will not be known.

One of the authors of this paper was presenting at a conference and a psychologist in attendance recalled from his boyhood a small group of boys who played together. However, one boy in particular stood out—we will call him Tim. Tim did not fit in with the others although the boys tried to welcome him. Tim confessed to one of them he had been strangling cats. Then he confessed to another. At the time, this small group of pre-teen boys did not know what to do. They formed a “militia” and patrolled the area to protect the neighborhood cats. Years later, one of the boys—now a man—received a call from the FBI asking if he knew Tim. He responded that he did but had not heard anything about him or from him for many years. If you do, contact us, the FBI requested. He is a serial killer operating between the U.S. and Canada.

Few people are aware that data from U. S. government security agencies indicates animal cruelty is also linked to terrorism. In July 2018, The Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team, a collaboration between the National Counterterrorism Center, the Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI, issued the report: [*Animal Cruelty: A Possible Warning Behavior for Terrorism and Other Premeditated Violence against Humans Which Needs Reporting and Further Vetting.*](#)

The report emphasizes that reporting, investigating and prosecuting acts of animal cruelty can help prevent acts of human violence, including terrorism. The report is a new addition to the Team's [*First Responder's Toolbox*](#) series.

The first federal crime fighting agency that recognized a connection between animal cruelty and other criminal acts was the Federal Bureau of Investigation. On September 9, 2014, the FBI Director approved the recommendation to collect animal cruelty crime data in the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS). In 2016 NIBRS reporting agencies began to include animal cruelty crimes.

The years of empirical evidence from multiple research studies confirmed the various ways in which animal cruelty is linked to other crimes including family violence, other interpersonal violence, and drugs. In addition to the formal research, reports from the field provided further insight. Awareness of the relationship between animal cruelty and other types of abuse can reveal instances of children who need protection. Another case indicates how animal cruelty and domestic violence are intertwined. A third case reveals how animal cruelty can aid law enforcement in bringing charges involving difficult circumstances.

Animal cruelty, Child Neglect and Abuse

An animal services officer investigated an animal cruelty case in Wakulla County, FL, where there were two horses and several dogs living on a property littered with hazards including broken boards, nails, glass, tree limbs, and a rather large sink hole. Two children were running around the yard barefooted, filthy, and subjected to the same hazards as the animals.

Upon filing a complaint with the Florida Department of Children and Families, the children were subsequently removed from this home where it was discovered they had been exposed to drug use.

Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence

A video captured a man dangling a dog off a second story balcony in the midst of a domestic dispute. The dog belonged to his girlfriend. He was adjudicated guilty of felony animal cruelty and sentenced to 60 days in jail and 1 year probation. Prior to this incident he had been sentenced to several months in jail for an unrelated domestic violence incident. He soon violated the conditions of his probation when he was charged with yet another case of domestic violence involving a new victim. He was sentenced to 9 months in jail for violation of probation on the original animal cruelty case.

Animal Cruelty and Illegal Drugs

An undercover drug investigator from a Sheriff's Department called an animal services agency. They had executed a search warrant for drugs but had come up with very little evidence. While on this property, investigators noted many dogs that were being kept in makeshift crates and pens. According to investigators, some of the dogs were thin and the overall environment did not look appropriate. When animal services responded to investigate, they discovered 27 dogs in various types of pens, most without adequate shelter and water. The dogs were thin and injured.

A stench of death was emanating from a 55-gallon barrel which contained several deceased dogs. Multiple criminal charges were filed against both owners of the property. They were sentenced to one year in jail, ordered to pay restitution, placed on probation after release, and enjoined from owning, working with, caring for, or living with animals. Law enforcement didn't have probable cause for drug charges but there was more than sufficient evidence for animal cruelty.

The evidence is in. Local, state, and federal law enforcement has a vested interest in animal cruelty crime, a crime that does not occur in isolation of other bad behavior.

NIBRS and Animal Cruelty Offenses

The following table includes the total number of reported animal cruelty offenses from 2016 – 2019 (the last year available) and the steady increase in reporting.

2016	2017	2018	2019
1,126	3,228	5,201	9,956

There is a gap in the reporting of these offenses which can be fixed. In some jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies which respond to reports of animal cruelty sometimes refer the case to the local animal services department. This may result in the offense not getting scored for NIBRS purposes. It is likely the number of actual offenses is much higher than the data indicates.

What is the FBI's definition of Animal Cruelty?

“Intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly taking an action that mistreats or kills any animal without just cause, such as torturing, tormenting, mutilation, maiming, poisoning, or abandonment. “

Included are instances of the failure to provide care such as shelter, food, water, or treatment for injury or illness.

Transporting or confining an animal in a manner likely to cause injury or death also meets the definition of cruelty. Causing an animal to fight with another, inflicting excessive or repeated unnecessary pain or suffering, or using objects to beat or injure animals should also be reported. The definition does not include proper maintenance of animals for show or sport; use of animals for food, lawful hunting, fishing or trapping.

What is the code for animal cruelty crime incidents?

While some states may have adopted different coding than that provided by the FBI, the standard code for the offense of animal cruelty is 720. Within the 720 code there are **four subcategories**:

- Neglect..... **A**
- Intentional..... **I**
- Animal Fighting..... **F**
- Animal Sexual Assault..... **S**

All animal cruelty incidents should be reported. An incident is any crime for which there is a complainant. The complainant can be a law enforcement officer or a citizen. An investigation or arrest is not necessary to report the incident for NIBRS purposes. Once an agency becomes aware of the crime, it must be counted.

What if I encounter other criminal activity at the incident?

If there is other criminal activity, enter the additional offenses in the police report. Law enforcement is responsible for including animal cruelty crimes in its NIBRS data. Animal control officers and humane law enforcement are also responsible for ensuring NIBRS reporting of these crimes.

Should I report animal cruelty to NIBRS if I am not located within a law enforcement agency?

Yes, if you are an animal control officer or humane law enforcement not attached to a law enforcement agency and you are in a NIBRS reporting state. Contact your local law enforcement agency to arrange for reporting animal cruelty crime incidents through their system.

Helpful resources.

Contact your state UCR director (<http://www.asucrp.net/membership-list/>) for assistance in ensuring the proper reporting of animal cruelty offenses. Included with this article is a fillable report form which can be used to assist in the capture of this data. Also included is a sample Memorandum of understanding which can be used to create interagency reporting agreements to ensure the reporting of animal cruelty to NIBRS.