Animal Cruelty Facts and Statistics

Statistics on the victims and current legislative trends

Continuous chaining is illegal in some parts of the country, and cruel everywhere. iStockphoto

The neglect found at puppy mills has generated prosecutions in many cases. Paul Turner/HSUS

Extreme confinement of farm animals is abusive, and some states are phasing it out. USDA

The shocking number of cruelty cases reported daily in the media is only the tip of the iceberg. Most cases are never reported, and most animal suffering goes unrecognized and unabated.

Although there is no national reporting system for animal abuse, media reports suggest that it is common in rural and urban areas. Cruelty and neglect can also cross socio-economic boundaries.

Based on media reports, we can review animal cruelty in terms of:
Most common victims

Horses
Livestock
Domestic violence
Legislative trends

Unless otherwise noted, the following statistics are compiled from pet-abuse.com.

Most Common Victims

In media-reported animal cruelty cases, dogs—and pit bull-type dogs, in particular—are the most common victims of animal cruelty. Of 1,880 cruelty cases* reported in the media in 2007:

- 64.5% (1,212) involved dogs
- 18% (337) involved cats
- 25% (470) involved other animals
- Reported abuse against pit bull-type dogs appears to be on the rise: in 2000–2001, pit bull-type dogs were involved in 13% of reported dog-abuse cases; in 2007, they were involved in 25% of reported dog-abuse cases.

*some cases involved multiple species

Horses

- According to the American Horse Council, Americans own more than 9 million horses, up from more than 6 million in the mid-1990s. Backyard breeding fueled the boom in pet horses. Of the more than 2 million Americans who own horses, more than one-third have a household income of less than $50,000. [1]
- Neither the total number of horse neglect cases nor the percentage of total animal abuse cases classified as horse neglect has risen since the closure of all U.S. horse slaughter plants.

Livestock

As HSUS investigations into slaughterhouses and cattle auctions have revealed, animal abuse abounds in the factory farm industry. Despite increased feed prices, we found no indication in the news media that the number of livestock neglect cases is increasing, other than a few shocking, high-profile cases. This may, however, simply be a reflection of the weak protections afforded to livestock under state animal cruelty laws.

- Many states specifically exclude livestock or any "common" agricultural practices from their cruelty laws, and even when good laws exist, it can sometimes be difficult to convince law enforcement to make an arrest and/or to seize livestock who are being neglected or abused.
- Over the past few years, the number of reported animal neglect cases involving cows and pigs has dipped slightly.
- In 2007, there were 20 reported neglect cases involving cows and eight involving pigs, down from 33 cow neglect cases and 11 pig neglect cases in 2006, and 26 cow neglect cases and nine pig neglect cases in 2005.

Domestic Violence

Government data scholarly studies of the prevalence of animal cruelty in domestic violence cases reveals a staggering number of animals are victimized by abusive partners each year.

The HSUS estimates that nearly 1 million animals a year are abused or killed in connection with domestic violence.

Statistics:

www.humanesociety.org/issues/abuse_neglect/facts/animal_cruelty_facts_statistics.html
About 2,168,000 women and men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner in the U.S. every year (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).
63% of U.S. households own a pet (APPMA, 2006).
71% of domestic-violence victims report that their abuser also targeted their animal (Ascione, 1997).
In 2007, 7% of media-reported animal cruelty cases either occurred in the context of a domestic dispute or involved a person with a history of domestic violence.

Legislative Trends
- 47 states currently have felony provisions for animal cruelty. (Those without are Idaho, North Dakota, and South Dakota.)
- Before 1986, only four states had felony animal cruelty laws.
- 42 of the 47 state felony animal cruelty laws were enacted in the last three decades: 13 were enacted between 1986 and 1996, and 28 more were enacted between 1997 and 2011.

First vs. Second Offense
- 43 of the 47 state felony provisions are first-offense provisions.
- Four are second-offense felonies (Iowa, Mississippi, Ohio, and Pennsylvania).
- Within the 43 first-offense felony states, several have a first-offense provision for aggravated cruelty, torture, companion animal cruelty, etc., in addition to a second-offense provision for cruelty to animals.

States Finding Second-Offense Laws Inadequate
- In the last decade, at least 6 states have enacted second- or third-offense felony animal cruelty laws, only to readdress and upgrade them to first-offense laws within a few years:
  - Alaska (3rd 2008, 1st 2010)
  - Indiana (2nd 1998, 1st 2002)
  - Kentucky (2nd 2003, 1st 2007)
  - Nebraska (2nd 2002, 1st 2003)
  - Virginia (2nd 1999, 1st 2002)

References