Title: Large Scale Dog Fighting Case Investigation

Case description: On November 2, 2012, a national animal welfare organization assisted the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in a suspected, multi-state dog fighting case. Dog fighting paraphernalia, including treadmills and blood-stained carpeting, was confiscated. Ninety-seven pit bull type dogs were seized as evidence. During legal proceedings, the dogs were housed in a temporary shelter constructed within a secured storage facility in an undisclosed location. Animal welfare professionals from across the country provided operational support and animal care on a rotating basis.

Each dog was identified by a unique number with a metal tag placed on its collar. Veterinarians, licensed in the state where the dogs were housed, examined the dogs and documented findings in individual medical records. Each record included photographs of the dog and a scar chart showing any recent and/or healed wounds. Parenteral Distemper-Adenovirus-Parainfluenza-Parvo and intranasal Bordetella-parainfluenza vaccines and a topical flea/tick product were administered. Any changes in physical or mental status that occurred while in the shelter were recorded in the medical record.

Diagnostics for all dogs included Babesia PCR (31% positive) and serology for heartworm antigen (8% positive), packed cell volume/total protein, and fecal flotation. An oral anthelmintic was administered after fecal sample collection. Complete blood count, chemistry profile, urinalysis, skin scrape, fungal culture, bacterial culture with sensitivity, and radiographs were performed as indicated by physical examination findings. Medical care was provided according
to each animal’s individual needs. DNA samples were submitted to the Canine Combined DNA Index System, a criminal dog fighting DNA database. All information was processed following protocols to preserve the chain of evidence.

Each dog was evaluated with a standardized behavior assessment starting on the fourth day in the shelter. The results helped direct in-shelter behavior modification strategies and determination of adoptability. Various enrichment items (elevated beds, knuckle bones, wobbler toys) were provided to all dogs.

**Outcome**: Two men were convicted of several charges related to animal fighting. Custody of all dogs was relinquished to the national animal welfare organization. As of March 20, 2013, 78 dogs were transferred to partner agencies for adoption and 19 dogs were euthanized because of aggressive behavior.

**Implications/Applications**: Dog fighting is a felony in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Collaboration amongst federal, state, and local authorities in addition to thoroughly documented veterinary examination of dogs can lead to successful prosecution of those involved in dog fighting. Information entered into the DNA database helps law enforcement agencies to identify relationships between dogs and allows investigation of those who breed and train dogs for fighting.

Dedicated staff members within temporary shelters can provide high quality veterinary care, environmental enrichment, and behavior modification to promote the health and welfare of dogs. With appropriate assessment and corresponding treatment provided as needed, select dogs from dog fighting cases can be adopted into homes. Dogs deemed to be a risk to public safety should be humanely euthanized.
Reference: