

SCVMA Lecture Tour November 2010

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Animal Abuse Effective Veterinary Response

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CANADIAN VETERINARY
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre
ATLANTIC VETERINARY COLLEGE • UPEI

Outline

- ▶ Ways veterinarians may be involved
 - ▶ Links with other family violence
 - ▶ **Addressing suspected abuse**
 - **Beforehand (be prepared)**
 - **Recognize abuse**
 - **Report abuse**
 - **Collecting and documenting evidence**
 - ▶ Resources
- 

Animal abuse – why a priority?

- ▶ Professional commitment to alleviate suffering
 - ▶ Well-trained in proper animal husbandry; well-equipped to recognize substandard care
 - ▶ Studies from child protection show intervention crucial
 - ▶ Early intervention may prevent escalation of violence
 - ▶ One aspect of family violence – pets, children, spouse, the elderly
- 


Ways vets may become involved

- ▶ Suspect abuse in patient
 - Brought in by abuser, someone else in family, Good Samaritan, humane org.
- ▶ Assist humane associations with investigations
 - Veterinary inspections
 - Medical care
 - Collecting/documenting evidence
- ▶ Factual or expert witness
- ▶ Provide foster care for pets of battered women

The Link with other forms of family violence

- ▶ Many studies – CVMA website on animal abuse [The Link](#)
- ▶ Collaborative study – Calgary HS and YWCA [McIntosh, 2001](#)
 - 56% of women in shelters who owned pets reported that their abuser had threatened or harmed their pet
 - 21% aware their abuser had abused pets as a child or adolescent
 - Of those with children and pets, 65% believed the children knew of, and were impacted by, the abuse.

Animal abuse – one form of family violence

- ▶ A way of maintaining power and control over victim.
 - ▶ A warning. “Next time it could be you.”
 - ▶ Leverage. Fear for the pet keeps the family member from disclosing abuse.
 - ▶ Kids abusing animals may be acting out what they see at home or, in the home, may be acting out their anger on the only family member lower in the pecking order
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Implications

- ▶ Women delay leaving abusive situations because of fears for pet's safety.
- ▶ Many women's shelters have arrangements with local animal shelters or veterinary hospitals to provide temporary housing.
 - Eg [SAFEPET programme Ontario](#)

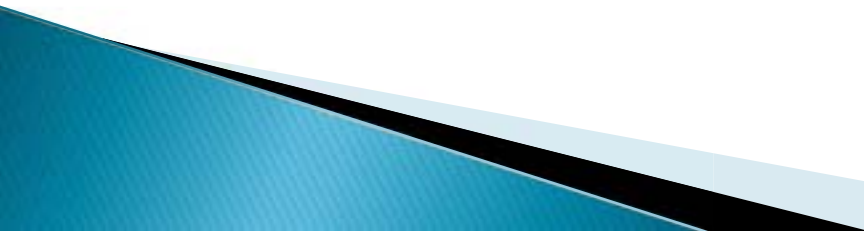
Addressing suspected abuse – Beforehand

- ▶ Find out national/local laws on animal protection:
- ▶ Provincial animal health acts
 - Animal in distress
 - lacking food, water, or care
 - Sick, in pain, or injured
 - Abused or subject to neglect or cruelty
 - CVMA Codes of Practice – [Dogs](#) and [Cats](#)
- ▶ Federal Criminal Code

Beforehand cont'd

- ▶ Find out your provincial/state regulations – VMA
 - Mandated reporting/immunity/confidentiality
- ▶ Know who to report to – local humane org.
- ▶ Discuss in your practice. Education about signs of abuse.
- ▶ Establish written clinic policy
 - Procedures, contact phone numbers (HS, police, Child Protection)
 - Follow-up strategy for borderline cases (rechecks, improved husbandry, etc)

Recognizing abuse and neglect

- ▶ Physical abuse
 - non-accidental injury – NAI
 - Inappropriate training methods
 - ▶ Sexual abuse
 - ▶ Emotional abuse
 - Inappropriate training
 - Withholding social interaction
 - ▶ Neglect (majority)
 - Lack of food, water, shelter, veterinary care
 - ▶ Fighting animals or training them to fight
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Warning signs – combination of factors

▶ History

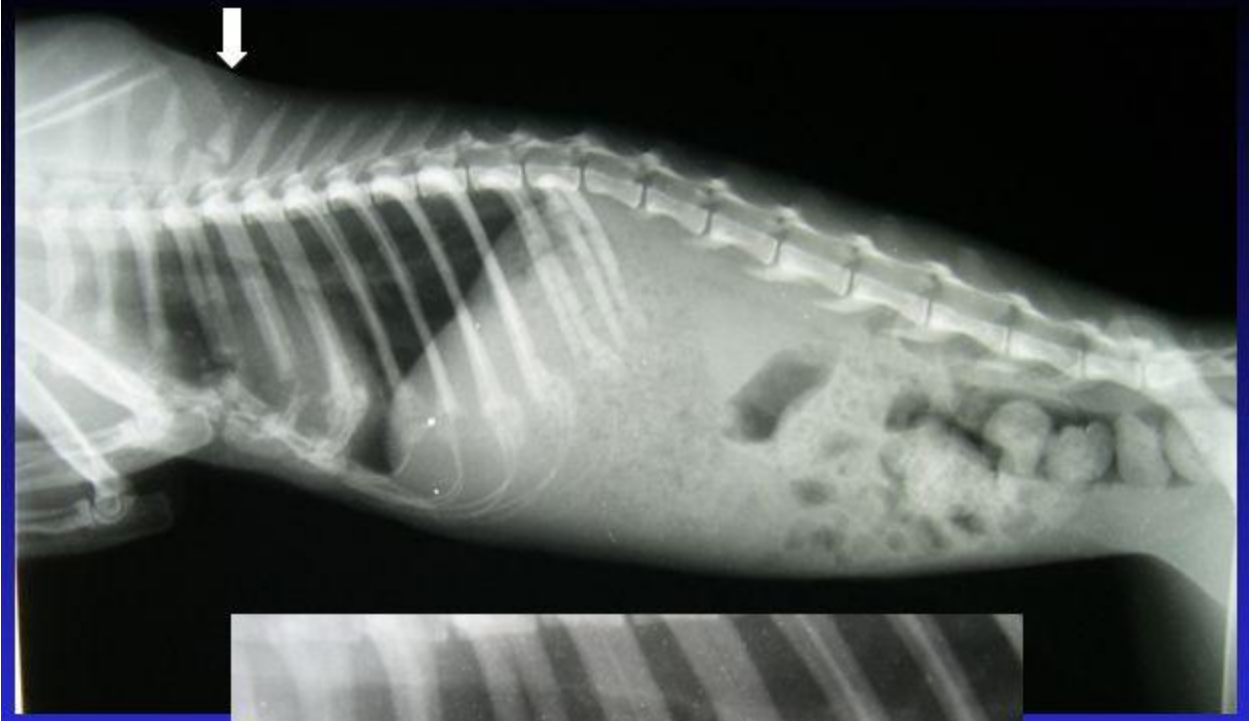
- Vague or implausible, discrepant
- The account of the incident doesn't fit the injury
- Owner evasive about how the injuries occurred
- Delay in seeking treatment
- Ask lots of questions – eg. Who has access to this animal?
- Previous injuries? Previous animals?
- Comments by other family members

▶ Behaviour

- Animal may be fearful, poorly socialized

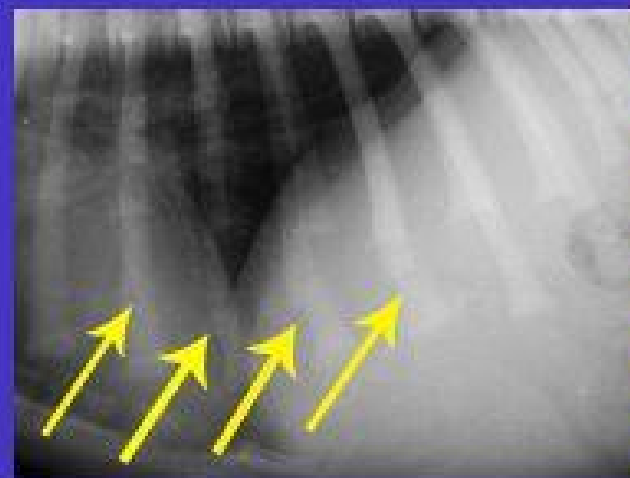
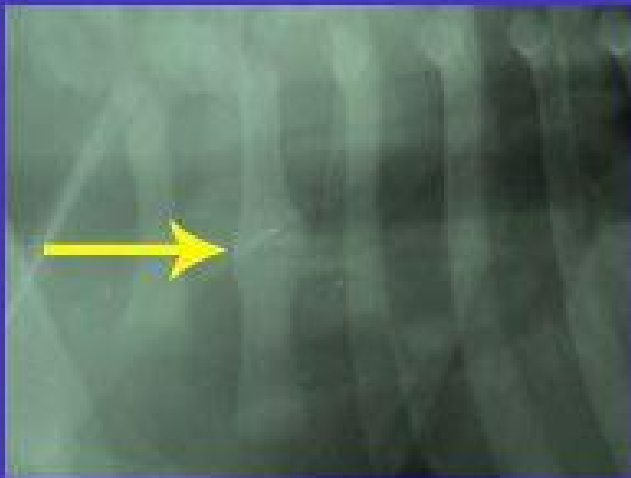
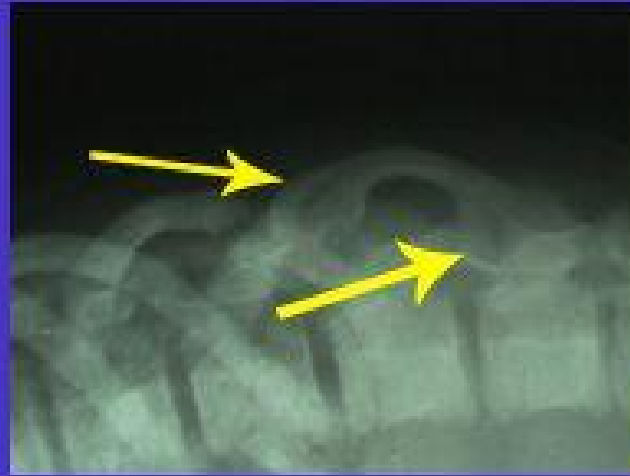
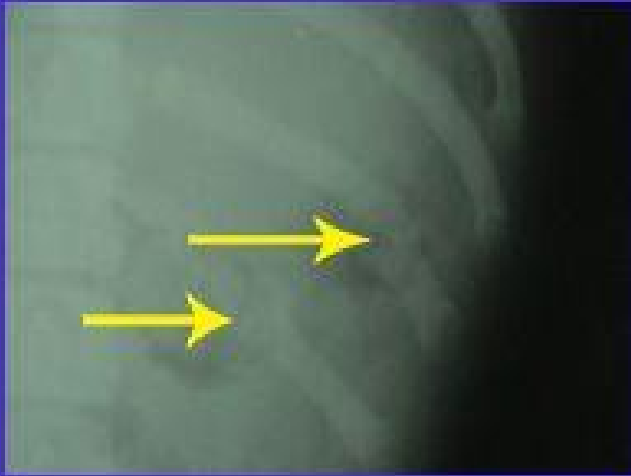
Warning signs – suspicious injuries

- ▶ Unexplained traumatic injuries
- ▶ Old fractures; different stages of healing (cardinal sign of abuse)
- ▶ Bruising (if shaved, or at necropsy)
- ▶ Ocular injuries (haemorrhage)
- ▶ Burns and scalds
- ▶ Stupor from alcohol or drug ingestion
- ▶ Old healed or untreated wounds
- ▶ Dogs for fighting – may be declawed or debarked
- ▶ Vaginal or anorectal injuries (sexual abuse)



©2005, M. Merck

3 month-old, female Pit Bull - multiple rib fx's



©2003, R. Reisman

Neglect

- ▶ Majority of cases
- ▶ Malnourishment
- ▶ Embedded collar
- ▶ Severe matting, overgrown nails, hooves; maggots
- ▶ Heavy parasite infestations
- ▶ Failure to provide vet care




Animal hoarding

- ▶ Accumulates a large number of animals that overwhelms their ability to provide even minimal standard of care
- ▶ Fails to acknowledge deteriorating conditions of animal and environment
- ▶ Does not recognize negative effects on health and well-being of the hoarder and others in the household
- ▶ [Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding/)
www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding/



Animal hoarding – warning signs

- ▶ Rarely see animals for repeat visits
 - ▶ Rarely see diseases of old age
 - ▶ Problems of poor preventive health
 - ▶ May seek heroic/futile care for newly acquired animals
 - ▶ May travel long distances, visit multiple vets
 - ▶ Animals may be bathed or perfumed
 - ▶ Claim to have found animal in deplorable conditions –animal may actually live in deplorable conditions
 - ▶ Always willing (eager) to take in more animals
- 

Animal sanctuaries/rescue

- ▶ Limited admission shelters (“no-kill”)
 - May be very well-run
 - But conditions may deteriorate if caregivers become overwhelmed
- ▶ **Bottom line – visit facility!**

SPCA seizes dogs, cats from shelter

CBC News Feb. 4, 2008

“The SPCA is reviewing its partnerships with shelters around Nova Scotia after it seized nearly 100 animals from a pet rescue centre in Port Hastings. With the help of several RCMP officers, two investigators removed 61 cats and 27 dogs from Celtic Pets Rescue on Saturday. The animals were "victims of horrible neglect," the SPCA said. ..

The shelter is run by Zonda MacIsaac, who has been involved in animal rescue in Nova Scotia for several years, according to the SPCA.”

Psychological well-being

- ▶ Attempts to have tethering limited or prohibited in some municipalities
- ▶ CVMA Code of Practice for Canadian Kennel Operations (2007) – tethering unacceptable as primary means of confinement




Abuse from routine handling

- ▶ Dog handling and training
 - Professional Standards for Dog Trainers – Delta Society
 - Humane Training Methods for Dogs – CVMA 2009 – <http://canadianveterinarians.net>
- ▶ Advocate positive training methods, discourage abusive methods
- ▶ Restraint during care
 - AVMA
 - Patronek and Lacroix “Developing an ethic for vets and other animal caregivers on abuse, discipline, and restraint” JAVMA 218: 1–4, 2001

Reporting animal abuse...

- ▶ Vets typically have not reported abuse
 - Often not straightforward; range of behaviours – unintentional neglect to malicious killing
 - Fear for animal's safety, personal safety
 - Uncertainty
 - Breach of confidentiality?
 - What if I'm wrong?
 - Process?
 - Time demands


Animal abuse – why report?

- ▶ Animals deserve protection in their own right
 - ▶ One aspect of family violence – pets, children, spouse, the elderly
 - ▶ Conduct disorder – antisocial behaviour affecting people, animals, property
 - ▶ CVMA, AVMA, AAHA positions: veterinarians should report suspected animal abuse
 - ▶ Legal obligation to report
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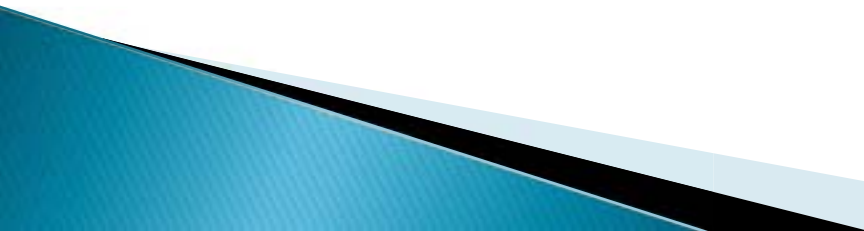
Addressing suspected abuse – report ?

- ▶ Some cases may be handled through education (neglect).
- ▶ Report evident abuse or ongoing neglect
- ▶ Child protection field – intervention is critical to break cycle of violence
- ▶ **NB:** reporting by vet is first step only – humane organization, law enforcement will do investigation – may or may not lead to charges; provides opportunity to educate owner about proper and legally required animal care


Educate or report?

- ▶ Use your judgment – may be able to improve neglect situations through education and working with the owner (follow-up essential).
 - ▶ Focus on meeting the needs of the animal, rather than the “bad” behaviour of the owner.
 - ▶ Mandated reporting – “(If we can’t improve the situation), I am required by law to report my concerns.”
- 

Educate or report – consider:

- ▶ Number, duration, severity of animal's problems
 - ▶ History – makes sense in light of injuries?
 - ▶ Animal's previous medical records
 - ▶ Records on any other animals for this client?
 - ▶ If there is evidence of abuse – REPORT
 - ▶ If conditions do not improve (borderline)– REPORT
 - ▶ If there are children involved, report to social services.
- 


Report to:

- ▶ **Local humane authority** – will investigate
 - ▶ **Police**, if concerns about immediate safety of animal/people
 - ▶ **Child protection** if children involved
- 

Report suspected abuse quickly –

- ▶ GOAL – initiate investigation to
 - Determine facts
 - Improve situation for the animal
- ▶ May start intervention that will help other family members
- ▶ Report even if first time seeing this client
- ▶ Report neglect – esp. recurrent with subsequent animals (hoarder?), or non-compliance

Remember

- ▶ Reporting by the vet is first step only
 - ▶ Humane organization, law enforcement will do the investigation
 - ▶ May or may not lead to charges; will provide opportunity for education about proper and legally required animal care
- 

Reporting by Cdn. veterinarians


- ▶ Confidentiality
 - Most provincial vet acts amended so that reporting is not a breach of confidentiality
- ▶ Mandated reporting/Immunity
- ▶ Reporting *in good faith*
 - Based on a reasonable suspicion according to vet's professional judgment
- ▶ Cdn vet colleges–VTH policies eg AVC

Legislation is changing!

e.g., Ontario SPCA Act (2008)

- ▶ Veterinarians' obligation to report
 - 11.3 Every veterinarian who has reasonable grounds to believe that an animal has been or is being abused or neglected shall report his or her belief to an inspector or an agent of the Society.
- ▶ Immunity
 - 19. No inspector or agent of the Society and no veterinarian or member of the Board is personally liable for anything done by him or her in good faith under or purporting to be under the authority of this Act. R.S.O. 1990, c. O.36, s. 19.
- ▶ ~ similar legislation now in Manitoba, PEI, NB, Alberta, NS, QC – check with your VMA
- ▶ Report even if not mandated.

Reporting suspected child abuse

- ▶ All jurisdictions except NL – anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is in need of protection is required to report the information to the appropriate authorities.
 - ▶ In NL, duty to report restricted to certain professions, not including veterinarians.
 - ▶ Report to Child and Family Services
- 

Addressing suspected abuse – Collecting & documenting evidence

- ▶ Ask lots of questions
- ▶ Perform thorough physical exam
- ▶ Can't hold/treat animal without owner's permission or until authorized by investigating agency
 - If permission for x-ray, can take whole body rads
- ▶ Document! Document! Document!!
 - Complete written record of injuries
 - Photographs/video (MS or neuro deficits)
 - Any conversations with client or other family members

PEI puppy mill/pet store case 2009-10

photos courtesy PEIHS



Photos courtesy PEIHS



Photos courtesy PEIHS



Photos courtesy PEIHS



Photos courtesy PEIHS



Photos courtesy PEIHS



Photos courtesy PEIHS




Photos courtesy PEIHS



Bud Wheatley, PEI 2009–10

- ▶ 2008–09: Vet. inspections with Dept of Ag.
- ▶ Oct. 09: 80 dogs and cats seized due to non-compliance
- ▶ Oct. 09: Vets worked w. PEIHS re medical assessments, documenting evidence, providing care (some animals euthanized, most adopted 😊)
- ▶ Charges laid under Criminal Code, PEI CAPAct
- ▶ Sept–Oct 2010: working with Crown pros. as expert witness
- ▶ Oct. 10: plea changed to guilty on all charges – **due to strength of case based on careful, thorough documentation by PEIHS, veterinarians** (before involvement of Crown)
- ▶ Sentence: 5 mos jail, 10 years prohib. on animal ownership; \$260,000 restitution costs


Collecting evidence...

- ▶ Additional information from other staff?
 - ▶ Work with investigating agency.
 - ▶ You may be called on to testify – factual or expert witness.
 - ▶ You may be called as expert witness in other cases of animal abuse.
 - ▶ Preserve/store all pertinent records securely –often long delays
- 

Addressing suspected abuse – Resources

- ▶ CVMA – many initiatives over last ~10 years
 - Position statement and consulting with prov. VMAs to encourage mandatory reporting by veterinarians
 - Education
 - Guidelines for vets
 - Presentations at CVMA AGMs
 - Lobbying to strengthen federal legislation
- ▶ CVMA web site on abuse
 - www.canadianveterinarians.net/animal-abuse.aspx
- ▶ Animal Abuse – What Veterinarians Can Do

www.canadianveterinarians.net/animal-abuse.aspx

- ▶ [The Link – Animal Abuse, Child Abuse and Domestic Violence](#)
 - ▶ [Recognizing Animal Abuse](#)
 - ▶ [Reporting Animal Abuse](#)
 - ▶ [Collecting and Documenting Evidence](#)
 - ▶ [Veterinarians as Expert Witnesses](#)
 - ▶ [Building a Safe and Humane Community](#)
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Collecting and Documenting Evidence

- ▶ Collecting physical evidence – forms (ASPCA)
 - Medical Evaluation of Neglect/Abuse case
 - Condition of skin – dog, cat
 - Body Condition Assessment
- body scoring
 - Dogs [Tufts Animal Care and Condition](#)
 - cats
 - Horses
 - Farm animals

Tufts Animal Care and Condition* (TACC) scales for assessing body condition, weather and environmental safety, and physical care in dogs

*Patnick, GJ. In: Recognizing and reporting animal abuse - a veterinarian's guide. Denver, CO: American Humane Association, 1997.

I. Body condition scale (Palpation essential for long-haired dogs; each dog's condition should be interpreted in light of the typical appearance of the breed)

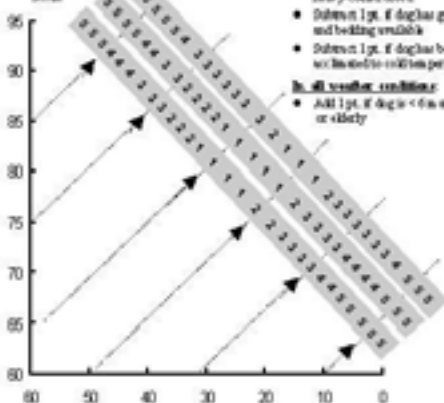
5	 <p>Emaciated</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All bony prominences evident from a distance• No discernible body fat• Obvious loss of muscle mass• Severe abdominal tuck and extreme hourglass shape
4	 <p>Very underweight</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, and pelvic bones easily visible• No palpable body fat• Some loss of muscle mass• Prominent abdominal tuck and hourglass shape to torso
3	 <p>Thin</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible, pelvic bones becoming prominent• Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat• Obvious waist and abdominal tuck• Minimal loss of muscle mass
2	 <p>Underweight / lean</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ribs easily palpable with minimal SQ fat• Abdominal tuck evident• Waist clearly visible from above• No muscle loss• May be normal for lean breeds such as sighthounds
1	 <p>Ideal</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ribs palpable without excess SQ fat• Abdomen tucked slightly when viewed from the side• Waist visible from above, just behind ribs

Body condition scale adapted from Lafamme, DP. Proc. N.A. Vet Conf 1993, 290-91; and Armstrong, P.J., Lund, EM. Vet Clin Nutr 3:83-87; 1996. Artwork by Erik Petersen.

II. Weather safety scale

End score off diagonal bars, by dog size:

V. Large / Giant
Medium / Large
Small



To determine score, draw a line up from the current temperature and parallel to the dotted line, and read score on bars. Consider score must be used to take into account the duration of exposure to any given temperature when assessing risk, even brief periods of high heat can be very dangerous, whereas a similar duration of exposure to cold temperatures would not be life-threatening.

III. Environmental health scale

- 5 Filthy** - many days to weeks of accumulation of feces and / or urine. Overwhelming odor, air may be difficult to breathe. Large amount of trash, garbage, or debris present, inhibits comfortable rest, normal posture, or movement and / or poses a danger to the animal. Very difficult or impossible for animal to escape contact with feces, urine, mud, or standing water. Food and / or drinking water contaminated.
- 4 Very unsanitary** - many days of accumulation of feces and / or urine. Difficult for animal to avoid contact with waste matter. Moderate amount of trash, garbage, or clutter present that may inhibit comfortable rest and / or movement of the animal. Potential injury from sharp edges or glass. Significant odor makes breathing unpleasant. Standing water or mud difficult to avoid.
- 3 Unsanitary** - several days accumulation of feces and urine in animal's environment. Animal is able to avoid contact with waste matter. Moderate odor present. Trash, garbage, and other debris cluttering animal's environment but does not prohibit comfortable rest or normal posture. Clutter may interfere with normal movement or allow dog to become entangled, but no sharp edges or broken glass that could injure dog. Dog able to avoid mud or water if present.
- 2 Marginal** - As in #3, except maybe somewhat less sanitary. No more than 1-2 day's accumulation of feces and urine in animal's environment. Slight clutter may be present.
- 1 Acceptable** - Environment is dry and free of accumulated feces. No contamination of food or water. No debris or garbage present to clutter environment and inhibit comfortable rest, normal posture and range of movement or pose a danger to or entangle the animal.

"Environment" refers to the kennel, pen, yard, cage, barn, room, tie-out or other enclosure or area where the animal is confined or spends the majority of its time. All of the listed conditions do not need to be present in order to include a dog in a specific category. The user should determine which category best describes a particular dog's condition.

In warm or hot weather:

- Subtract 1 pt. if water is available
- Subtract 1 pt. if dog is in a shaded or protected from full sun.
- Add 1 pt. if dog is in shade or protected
- Add 1 pt. if dog is shaded

In cool or cold weather:

- Add 1 pt. if dry dog
- Add 2 pts. if dog out in sun / hot.
- Subtract 1 pt. if dog is in sunburn or heavy coated breed
- Subtract 1 pt. if dog has good shelter and bedding available
- Subtract 1 pt. if dog has been acclimated to cold temperatures

In all weather conditions:

- Add 1 pt. if dog is < 6 lbs. with a pup or puppy

Interpretation of the TACC score from scales I - IV:

The Tufts Animal Condition and Care (TACC) score is assessed from the number of points read off either the **Body Condition, Weather Safety, Environmental Health or Physical Care Scales**. When multiple scales are evaluated, the highest score on any scale should be used to determine the risk of neglect. Multiple high scores are an indication of greater neglect, risk, or infirmity treatment than a single high score.

Score	Body condition, physical care, environmental health scales	Weather safety scale
5	Severe neglect and infirmity treatment. An urgent situation that justifies an assertive response to protect the animal.	Potentially life-threatening risk present. Immediate intervention to decrease threat to the animal required (provide water, shelter).
4	Clear evidence of serious neglect and / or infirmity treatment (unless there is a medical explanation for the animal's condition). Prompt improvement required.	Dangerous situation developing. Prompt intervention required to decrease risk (e.g. provide water, shade, shelter, or bring indoors). Warn owner of risk and shelter requirements.
3	Indication of neglect present. Timely assessment, correction of problems and/or monitoring of situation may be required.	Indication of a potentially unsafe situation, depending on breed, time outdoors. Inform owner of risk and proper shelter requirements.
2	A lapse in care or discomfort may be present. Evaluate, and discuss concerns with owner. Recommend changes in animal husbandry practices, if needed.	Risk is unlikely, but evaluate the situation, and if warranted, discuss your concerns and requirements for proper shelter with the owner.
1	No evidence of neglect based on scale (s) used.	No evidence of risk.

Disclaimer: The TACC score is intended to be a simple screening device for determining when neglect may be present, for prioritizing the investigation of reported animal cruelty cases, and as a system for investigative agencies to use to estimate their case exposure. The TACC score is not intended to replace a thorough assessment of any animal by a veterinarian or law enforcement agent. A low TACC score does not preclude a diagnosis of abuse, neglect, or a dog requiring veterinary care upon arrival at a shelter or institution of care, or a dog in a living situation.

IV. Physical care scale

- 5 Terrible** - extremely matted haircoat, prevents normal motion, interferes with vision, pinched areas irritated from soiling with trapped urine and feces. Hair coat essentially a single mat. Dog cannot be groomed without complete clip-down. Foreign material trapped in matted hair. Nails extremely overgrown into circles, may be penetrating pads, causing abnormal position of feet and make normal walking very difficult or uncomfortable. Collar or chain, if present, may be imbedded in dog's neck.
- 4 Poor** - substantial matting in haircoat, large clumps of hair matted together that cannot be separated with a comb or brush. Occasional foreign material embedded in mat. Much of the hair will need to be clipped to remove mat. Long nails force feet into abnormal position and interfere with normal gait. Pinched soiling or irritation likely. Collar or chain, if present, may be extremely tight, shedding skin.
- 3 Borderline** - numerous mats present in hair, but dog can still be groomed without a total clip-down. No significant pinched soiling or irritation from waste caught in matted hair. Nails are overlong for a trim and long enough to cause dog to alter gait when it walks. Collar or chain, if present, may be snug and rubbing off neck hair.
- 2 Lapped** - haircoat may be somewhat dirty or have a few mats present that are easily removed. Remainder of coat can easily be brushed or combed. Nails in need of a trim. Collar or chain, if present, fits comfortably.
- 1 Adequate** - dog clean, hair of normal length for the breed, and hair can easily be brushed or combed. Nails do not touch the floor, or barely contact the floor. Collar or chain, if present, fits comfortably.

All of the listed conditions do not need to be present in order to include a dog in a specific category. The user should determine which category best describes a particular dog's condition. This scale is not meant for assessment of medical conditions, e.g., a broken limb, that clearly indicate a need for veterinary attention.

Veterinary forensics

- ▶ Melinda Merck, DVM
 - [The Veterinarian's Role in Handling Animal Abuse Cases : Veterinary Forensics : Making the Case – Proving Cruelty Through Forensics](#)
- ▶ International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association
 - www.ivfsa.org
- ▶ Veterinary Forensics Site
 - www.veterinaryforensics.com

Books

- ▶ Ascione F, Arkow P. eds. Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention. Purdue University Press 1999.
- ▶ Sinclair L, Merck M, Lockwood R. Forensic Investigation of Animal Cruelty: A Guide for Veterinary and Law Enforcement Professionals; HSUS Press 2006
- ▶ Miller L, Zawistowski S. eds. Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff Blackwell c. 2004

Conclusion

- ▶ Address individual cases of suspected animal abuse effectively
 - Client education may resolve cases of neglect
 - Learn to recognize, report and document animal abuse and neglect
- ▶ Work with other agencies
 - SPCAs, investigators, family protection services
 - To protect both animals and people



Anyone who has accustomed himself to regard the life of any living creature as worthless is in danger of arriving also at the idea of worthless human lives.

Albert Schweitzer