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Facts about Animal Cruelty

What is animal cruelty?

Animal cruelty encompasses a range of behaviors harmful to animals, from neglect to malicious killing. Most cruelty cases investigated by the Animal Control Officers from the Yakima Humane Society is unintentional neglect that can be resolved through education.

Why is it a concern?

All animal cruelty is a concern because it is wrong to inflict suffering on any living creature. Intentional cruelty is a particular concern because it is a sign of psychological distress and often indicates that an individual either has already been a victim of violence or might be predisposed to committing acts of violence.

Why would anyone be cruel to animals?

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

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

Absolutely. Many studies in psychology, sociology, and criminology in the past 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 1970's, when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested that most had killed or tortured animals as children.

Other research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of other forms of violence, including child abuse, spousal abuse, and elder abuse. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder.

What happens when authorities prosecute an animal cruelty case?

Depending on the severity of the case, those convicted of animal cruelty can be imprisoned. Appropriate sentencing can also include individual or family counseling, community service, placement in a diversion program, and a prohibition on owning or caring for animals.

It is rarely the goal of police to imprison a child for cruelty to animals. Law enforcement officers and judges recognize that cruelty to animals is one part of a complex problem. Sometimes, the official response to animal cruelty provides a family its first opportunity to get help.

How many animals are victims of cruelty each year?

Because there is no national reporting requirement for animal abuse, there is no way to track the number of animal cruelty cases that are filed or that make it to court each year. The idea of creating animal abuser registries, similar to sex abuser registries, has been advocated for a long time. The nation's first registry was established in Suffolk County, N.Y.

What can I do to help fight animal cruelty?

Be aware of the signs of animal cruelty and call the Animal Control Officers at the Yakima Humane Society at (509) 457-6854 to report animal cruelty to a dog or cat. Provide us with as much detailed information as possible so that we can accurately assess the situation and better protect the animal from harm.

For additional information please contact our Outreach & Education Manager, Nicole Papageorgiou, at (509) 457-6854 ext. 106 or, by email, outreach@yakimahumane.org.