

Reprinted from the Humane Society of the United States

DOGFIGHT INVESTIGATIVE TECHNIQUES - LOCAL LEVEL  
THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATIONS

BACKGROUND

The investigation of dogfighting by local animal control, law enforcement, and humane organizations is often difficult, frustrating and unsuccessful. This lack of success is usually due to circumstances beyond the control of the local agency. Because of the specialized nature of this activity, dogfighting participants are usually scattered throughout several counties and often other states. This wide distribution of participants and fighting activity makes local surveillance impossible.

The somewhat uneventful time period between fights also creates problems for investigators: (1) It becomes difficult to justify the investigation since little or no activity is observed to indicate that individual(s) are participants in dogfighting; (2) It allows the fighter time to observe and identify local investigators since most are public employees and therefore have jobs which make them highly visible to the public.

Before you attempt to gather information on dogfighting, you must first understand how dogfight participants view enforcement personnel and their investigative procedures.

Unlike other crimes, where the activity occurs on a regular basis (daily, weekly, or monthly), dogfighting is most often held at irregular intervals. This is in part due to the fact that the injuries a dog endures often requires several months to completely heal before the dog can return to training. Unless your area has a large number of fighting dogs and/or a level of fighters, that are more concerned with gambling than preserving the breed and who are not willing to devote the time and effort to condition their dogs but will fight at regular intervals, then dogfighting in your area will always be a sporadic activity.

Fights are repeatedly moved to avoid detection. They are often conducted on or near a holiday (Easter, Thanksgiving, Labor Day, etc.) that includes a three-day weekend so participants from out of the area will have sufficient travel time and out-of-state license plates will be less noticeable in an out-of-the-way area.

The individuals who participate in dogfighting are aware of two things: (1) the activity is illegal in the U.S., with many states carrying it as a felony violation; and (2) if caught, the

media and public will be so outraged that their existence in a community will be difficult.

For these reasons, participants have: (1) created a "fraternity"-type atmosphere, often to the point where new dogs are introduced to the group before new participants are; (2) instilled a fear of retaliation into all involved to discourage police informants; (3) created a "double life" image through their involvement with legal pit bull shows, steady employment and/or involvement with community activities; and (4) kept current on investigative techniques, law enforcement personnel, and agencies opposed to dogfighting.

### INVESTIGATIVE AIDS

Although it is difficult to investigate dogfighting on a local level, it is not impossible. Here are investigative aids and possible sources of information that have proven helpful in other large scale investigations.

- (1) Vehicle license numbers.  
Investigators should gather and record all vehicle license numbers of people who own pit bulls, associate with pit bull owners, inquire about pit bulls, are arrested or present at dogfights, or are otherwise connected with dogfighting or pit bulls.
- (2) Classified pet ads.  
The collection of "Pit Bulls" or "American Pit Bull Terriers" ads will provide a list of breeders, phone numbers, and possible leads for an investigation. It will also give a feeling for the concentration of pit bulls in your area and, over a several month period, could indicate a rise or fall in popularity.
- (3) Complaints recorded.  
The accurate recording of all complaints concerning pit bulls, including any witnesses, and a description of the incident could be helpful in a long term investigation.
- (4) Aliases.  
Due to the fear of being caught, many fighters will use an alias or nickname. Knowledge of these nicknames makes it sometimes possible to track the individual in underground publications.
- (5) Dogs owned.  
Although the individual will use an alias, the dog's name often remains the same throughout his life. The dog's name is usually two-part, with the first part

identifying the breeder or current owner and second part being the dog's name. (EXAMPLE: Ironrun's Spike.)

(6) Pit Bull breeders.

Even if the breeder is opposed to dogfighting, he will have contact with individuals who are interested in purchasing fighting dogs. You should also contact the breeders of AKC American Staffordshire Terriers since many beginning fighters do not know the difference between the breeds and will contact them for fighting dogs.

(7) Veterinarians.

Since some fighters will use the services of local veterinarians, it is possible they will assist you with information concerning their treatment of animals with severe injuries. Remember though, the veterinarians are under no legal obligation to report these treatments and could refuse to do so, quoting the professional ethic of doctor/client confidentiality.

(8) Police Informants.

If you have the relationship or opportunity to work with your local law enforcement officers (especially those involved with vice investigations such as narcotics), suggest that questions about dogfighting activity be part of their regular inquiries of police informants. Remember, most raids have produced arrests not only for animal fighting but also for concealed weapons, operating an establishment for gaming purposes, illegal sale of alcohol, narcotics, gambling and unreported income:

(9) Surveillance.

This could include the recording of departure times, activities and/or visitors to a property by a cooperative neighbor, or your personal observation of the property. Remember, due to the length of time that often elapses between fights, you could risk alerting the participant to your presence, thus endangering the investigation.

(10) Pit Bull Shows.

There has been an effort to improve the public image of pit bulls through legal UKC (United Kennel Club) and ADBA (American Dog Breeders Association) confirmation and weight-pull shows, sometimes referred to as point-and-pull shows. State (ADBA or UKC) affiliated clubs have been formed and, for all intents and purposes, this activity is legal and - most important -