



Dog Fighting

Advice for law enforcement



Despite being illegal since 1835, dog fighting remains a significant animal welfare issue in the UK. It's one of the most horrific forms of organised animal cruelty, not only for the violence the dogs endure during fights but for the trauma they suffer throughout their lives. Training methods brutalise and fights inflict untold physical and mental suffering on 'man's best friend'.

This advice sheet is designed to help you understand the powers at your disposal, how dog fighting operates and how to spot the signs.

Dog fighting is often a 'gateway crime'

At a time when resources are stretched, it's important to understand that dog fighting can be a gateway crime linked to drugs, gangs, theft, anti-social behaviour and other forms of violence. For this reason in the USA it's treated as a felony because of the links to other serious crimes such as illegal possession of weapons and offenders wanted for other crimes.

Legal framework

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides a number of powers to help you tackle dog fighting:

- Under section 8 of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) it's an offence to cause animals to fight. It's also an offence to receive money for admission to a fight; to bet on the outcome of a fight; to publicise a fight; to encourage attendance at a fight; to

make or accept bets on the outcome of a fight; to attend a fight (without lawful authority or reasonable excuse), to possess anything designed or adapted for use in connection with a fight; to keep or train an animal for use in a fight; to use any premises for fighting.

- It's also an offence to supply, publish, show or possess a video of a fight in the UK (without lawful authority or reasonable excuse).
- Section 4 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to a protected animal.
- Section 18 provides powers to alleviate suffering by removing a protected animal.
- Section 19 provides powers to enter premises (except a dwelling) for the purpose of searching for a protected animal which is believed to be suffering or will suffer if its circumstances do not change.
- Section 19 (4) provides powers to apply to a magistrate for a search warrant to enter premises (Section 17 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides additional powers of entry to arrest a suspect for AWA offences relating to the prevention of harm to animals).
- Section 54 provides powers to stop and search vehicles for animals.

The maximum custodial sentence for dog fighting is six months in prison. Proceedings must commence within three years of the date of offence, and within six months of the date on which evidence that the prosecutor thinks is sufficient to justify the proceedings comes to light.

Locations

Convictions for dog fighting show that it takes place in major cities and towns as well as rural communities.

Fights tend to take place anywhere out of sight: for example in garages, basements, outhouses, car parks and on farmland. If you're dealing with professional dog fighters, it's likely they'll be using a fighting pit (usually between 14 and 20 feet square) with carpet or canvas on the floor to improve traction. Pits sometimes have diagonal lines marked in opposite corners to mark out 'scratch lines' with tape or paint. This can be a makeshift structure to make it easier to hide - a simple test for blood could provide useful evidence.

Types of dogs

Evidence from police forces around the country and internationally show a wide range of dogs are used. Bull breeds are common but they're not always large dogs. Dogs used as 'practice' can be of any breed or size.

How to spot the signs of dog fighting:

- Frightened (aggressive) dogs with scars on the face, head, front legs or thighs with puncture wounds, swollen faces, and mangled ears.
- Most dogs used for fighting are kept in poor quality housing and are in need of veterinary treatment.
- Evidence of journals, books or online searches into dog fighting or 'game dogs'.
- Excessive dog exercise regimes which may involve weights that can be attached to the dog's collar or chain to build muscle or treadmills used to build their cardiovascular capacity.
- Break sticks which are used to force the dog to release its bite.
- Scales used for weighing dogs before the fight.
- Washing bowls to remove any noxious substances such as poisons from the skin before a fight.
- Veterinary supplies such as intravenous drips, drugs – for example steroids and antibiotics, tools for stitching skin.

Dog fighting paraphernalia



An example of a fighting pit.



Treadmill used for building strength.



DIY vet supplies used to treat injuries.



Typical scarring patterns



An example of wooden break sticks

Information-sharing agreements with police forces across the UK

The League has a number of Information Sharing Agreements with local police forces. These help share information about what's happening on the ground and means we can work together to stamp out this horrendous abuse. If you are interested in putting this in place for your force please email: reportdogfighting@league.org.uk

The League Against Cruel Sports is a respected animal welfare charity, leading the way on exposing and understanding dog fighting. We can help with information and advice from leading experts in this field which include ex police officers.



Help us #EndDogFighting

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