

ANIMAL ABUSE CASE DETAILS

Neglecting 56 horses Ada County, ID (US)

Date: Apr 1, 2004
County: Ada
Disposition: Alleged

Abuser names unreleased

Case Snapshot

Case ID: 2153
Classification: Neglect /
Abandonment
Animal: horse
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In the largest animal seizure in Idaho Humane Society's history, the agency confiscated 56 horses on the morning of April 1, 2004. The owner of the horses allegedly wasn't giving them enough food despite repeated warnings, according to Susan Clark, animal control community outreach coordinator. Officials would not name the owner, saying they are negotiating with him to relinquish his ownership of the horses.

Some of the horses could have died within two weeks without the intervention, experts said. All of the animals are expected to survive now, they said.

Bones sharply protrude from the animals' hips. Despite a thick winter coat of hair that the horses will soon lose, ribs are easily visible. Clark said they have "ewe necks," a term used to describe animals whose necks are unnaturally thin. Although they are emaciated, many of the horses have round, drooping bellies caused by muscle loss.

An equine specialist will begin evaluating the horses today, but initial examination confirmed they are badly malnourished. On a body condition scale of 1 to 9, with 1 being starving and 9 being overweight, the horses seized Thursday were rated between 1 1/2 and 3, Clark said.

The horses were living in a pasture near Boise, but officials would not specify the location or the name of the man who owns them. The Idaho Humane Society is trying to get the owner to sign the horses over to the agency so they can be adopted.

If he doesn't relinquish the horses, he faces 56 counts of animal cruelty, Clark said.

The man was investigated by the Humane Society in 1998 after the agency received complaints, but he complied with requests to feed the horses and the animals weren't seized, Clark said.

But in the past few weeks, the agency began receiving renewed complaints from neighbors and passersby, including an animal control officer from another county. Animal control officers investigated and told the man March 13 that he had three days to get hay for the horses, Clark said. Officers checked the property every day until the deadline.

Instead of nourishing hay, the owner purchased 20 bales of cheap straw, she said. Officers also evaluated the condition of the property where the horses were kept. On a rating scale from "poor" to "excellent," the property was rated as "fair" because the horses had access to water and a small amount of foliage.

The horses were living off the straw, some spring grass and nearby bushes, Clark said, but it was clear to authorities the animals weren't getting enough food to survive. The Blazer horses — a cross between Arabian and quarter horse — vary in age. Some of the horses are pregnant, and one filly was born on Tuesday night.

Animal control officers arrived at 8 a.m. Thursday to seize the animals. The Bureau of Land Management helped the agency move the horses by lending them several horse trailers and the help of BLM cowboys. The horses are being kept at the BLM wild horse corral off Pleasant Valley Road.

The horses were easily rounded up because they were so eager to eat that they walked willingly into the containment areas where food was waiting for them, she said.

Clark said the owner apparently let the horses breed at will, and the size of his herd grew to the point that he couldn't keep up with their nutritional needs, she said.

"He's simply someone who allowed the horses to get out of control," Clark said.

The Idaho Equine Hospital is managing the horses' nutritional and medical rehabilitation, partner Liz Scott said. Starving horses can't recover by eating large amounts of food because the sudden change in diet can cause internal damage, Scott said.

"The goal of the body during starvation is to economize, to do whatever is necessary to live with low or no food supplies," Scott said.

Horses with little or no food initially use their body fat as an energy source, then muscle protein begins to deteriorate. Muscle in the horses' backs, sides and legs diminish. Eventually the horses go into multiple organ failure and then die, she said.

These horses were able to survive because they had a limited amount of food and water, but they likely would have died within weeks, she said.

"It's definitely gross negligence," Scott said.

Now the horses will be fed a quality grass hay in gradually increasing amounts, along with nutritional supplements. They also need treatment for lice and worms and will eventually be vaccinated.

References

- The Idaho Stateman

Note: Classifications and other fields should not be used to determine what specific charges the suspect is facing or was convicted of - they are for research and statistical purposes only. The case report and subsequent updates outline the specific charges. Charges referenced in the original case report may be modified throughout the course of the investigation or trial, so case updates, when available, should always be considered the most accurate reflection of charges.

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