

VETERINARY HOSPITAL SOP FOR HANDLING SUSPECTED ABUSE:

It is important to have an SOP for a veterinary hospital to handle and report suspected abuse cases. Depending on the jurisdiction, the responsible agency for investigating cruelty may be one or more agencies, i.e. police, animal services, department of agriculture, depending on the type of crime or the species involved. The prosecutor responsible for animal cruelty cases should also be identified – this may be different people depending on the level of crime: solicitor vs. district attorney. All staff should be trained on the SOP and the animal cruelty laws and practice act affecting reporting of suspected abuse. All staff should sign a document regarding confidentiality of client and pet information as a standard in all veterinary practices. This is especially important on legal cases and should include a policy prohibiting sharing of information or photos on social media or electronically. These policies should be part of the staff training and the SOP.

The SOP should include a binder with information and forms in sheet protectors. It should include several key components:

- Copy of applicable veterinary practice act laws including mandatory reporting, liability protection
- Agency(s) responsible for cruelty investigations including all contact information
- Name of head cruelty officer in your area including cell number for emergencies
- From responsible investigating agency: ‘after hours’ contact and reporting/response protocol
- Potential chain of command within the hospital for authorization/approval to report suspected abuse for new or untrained staff – should not result in delayed reporting
- Protocol for handling of animal after reporting: cruelty officer and/or prosecutor should provide input on legal protocol for retention and protection of the animal (live or deceased). Body should be held post examination until released by the investigator or prosecutor.
- Protocol for handling of live and deceased animal: documentation, chain of custody, photographs, records
- Forms: all forms should be downloaded and placed in the SOP binder at www.veterinaryforensics.com – click on the Forms tab for the complete list.

The key is to establish a relationship early with the investigating agency/officers and the prosecutors. Invite them to come to your hospital to provide training on the law, liability, reporting and response.

Resources:

Training – www.vetfolio.com/forensics; www.hsvma.org

Forms and other resources - www.veterinaryforensics.com

AVMA Animal Welfare Policies -

<https://www.avma.org/kb/resources/reference/animalwelfare/pages/animal-welfare-policystatements.aspx>

Textbook - Veterinary Forensics: Animal Cruelty Investigations, 2nd ed., John Wiley Publishing

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