

LA Animal Services' statement regarding a recent animal cruelty arrest:

LA Animal Services and the City Attorney have received numerous complaints from the neighbors of a Mr. Ron Mason since 2004. Mr. Mason lives in Northridge. LA Animal Services has attempted to assist Mr. Mason with a growing number of cats in his care for over two years. These attempts included providing information, spay/neuter vouchers, and contact and support information with local cat rescue organizations. This month it was finally determined that Mr. Mason was either unwilling or unable to manage and care for his cats in a sufficiently humane manner and the case was submitted to the Los Angeles City Animal Cruelty Task Force (ACTF).

On October 9th, 2007, the ACTF initiated an investigation. During this investigation Mr. Mason released six sick kittens to the Task Force. The kittens were field tested and the test showed positive for Panleukopenia. Additional samples were taken and sent to a lab because it is not uncommon for a field test to show false positive results. The results from the lab came back negative on October 12th.

Although the initial test results raised concerns that neighborhood cats may be at risk of a highly contagious and deadly disease, Panleukopenia, this information only served to hasten the timing of ACTF's visit to Mr. Mason's house. This information had no bearing on the warrants served or the euthanasia of the six kittens. The warrants were largely prepared and ready to go before the field test results were known and the kittens were humanely euthanized because they were irremediably suffering. The kittens were emaciated when received from Mr. Mason and were suffering with impacted rectums and crusted eyes, along with a respiratory infection. They had pale mucous membranes and were severely dehydrated. The oculo-nasal discharge was symptomatic of feline viral rhinotracheitis.

The investigation provided ample evidence of animal neglect and hoarding and a search and arrest warrant was served on October 11, 2007, on Mr. Mason, charging him with California Penal Code Section 597 (B) Felony Animal Neglect.

The search of the residence found deplorable living conditions for both the cats and lone resident of the single-family dwelling. The smell of cat urine permeated the residence and surrounding yard and the house was littered with cat feces on the floors, walls, furniture, and kitchen appliances. These conditions made the house uninhabitable for both humans and animals. Public health and building safety violations are being considered. Many of the mature cats and numerous kittens appeared to be suffering from various illnesses. Twelve fairly healthy cats were found in Mr. Mason's bedroom. These cats appear to have been used as breeding stock.

Fifty-one cats were rescued and transported to the West Valley and South LA Animal Care Centers on October 11th where they were assessed and treated by LA Animal Services' veterinarians and medical staff. Among them were five litters of kittens and several unsterilized adults.

The resident/suspect was booked at Devonshire Jail and after booking he was interviewed by LAPD's System-Wide Mental Health Assessment Response Team.

Health care professionals recognize "animal hoarding" as a form of mental illness. A common result of this illness is that the patient is often unaware that his or her animals are suffering from medical and social neglect. Statistics suggest there is nearly a 100% recidivism rate among hoarders, which explains why the department's good faith efforts to assist Mr. Mason failed over

the past two years. Prosecution and terms of probation will hopefully provide Mr. Mason with the counseling and support he needs and put a stop to the tragic cycle of breeding and suffering occurring on his premises.

The characterization of this rescue by some as a media event is nonsense. Unlike many organizations, LA Animal Services is committed to transparency. Sometimes that works for us, sometimes that works against us. The reason department critics have as much information as they do about this case is because of our transparency. If we had allowed no reporters or photographers to accompany the ACTF, the same individuals would have criticized us for that. We can assure the public that nothing untoward, unprofessional, or inhumane occurred before, during, or after this arrest and the rescue of these animals.

A suggestion that a photograph taken during the rescue makes it look like a cat was strangled is also nonsense. The cat photographed on the end of a catch pole was found wedged behind a cabinet inside the garage, and was hiding on top of a dead cat's decomposed body. After many attempts to reach the cat by hand, cat-nabbers (net basket), and a traditional net failed, the cat was finally secured on the end of a catchpole as a last resort. At the time, the scene was noisy and not conducive to the kind of quiet, gentle coaxing any one of us might employ when cajoling a cat from a narrow space behind an immovable piece of furniture. Once secure the cat was quickly brought out from behind the cabinet and safely placed in a wire cage. It was at the moment the cat was freed from behind the cabinet that the Daily News photographer snapped the picture featured in the newspaper and circulated on the internet. The cat was not held up in display for the photographer and the cat suffered no ill effects from the catch pole.

As of October 26, twenty-five cats have been euthanized because of irremediable suffering. The kittens did not appear to be receiving veterinary treatment at the time the ACTF arrived. Although a small amount of Amoxi-drops (amoxicillin) was found at the residence, such antibiotics are not effective against the viral rhinotracheitis from which these animals suffered. Twice daily subcutaneous fluid replacement and diligent nursing care is indicated and even then kittens often succumb. This treatment was not being provided.

A department veterinarian on site during the rescue remarked that he had never seen cats kept in such deplorable conditions; the odors, excrement, and lack of sanitary conditions were extreme.