



Government Makes a Case, and Holds Dogs as Evidence



Humane Society of the United States

One of the 54 pit bulls taken from Michael Vick's property. In the indictment of Vick and three others, the government said some of the dogs "had scars and injuries appearing to be related to dog fighting."

By MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT
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SURRY, Va., July 31 — More than 60 dogs seized from Michael Vick's property have been sheltered here and in kennels across several counties in southeastern Virginia since April.

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The dogs' fate has been undecided while the government investigates a suspected dogfighting ring that federal prosecutors say was run from the property. The dogs are considered evidence and, eventually, will probably be euthanized.

"Officials from our organization have examined some of these dogs and, generally speaking, they are some of the most aggressively trained pit bulls in the country," Wayne Pacelle, the president and chief executive of the Humane Society of the United States, said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "Hundreds of thousands of less-violent pit bulls, who are better candidates to be rehabilitated, are being put down. The fate of these dogs will be up to the

government, but we have recommended to them, and believe, they will be eventually put down."

Pacelle said the Humane Society normally advocated that fighting dogs be put down shortly after being seized.

"Four months is a long time, a long time to be warehoused," he said. "They may be walked only once a day, if that. We don't know how well they are being kept. They are likely being held in cages for months on end."

But Pacelle said his organization supported the government's efforts. "It is lose-lose for the dogs," he said. "They either die a gruesome death as a dogfighter in action, or they will be killed because they are not adoptable."

A spokeswoman at the United States attorney's office in Richmond described the dogs as part of the investigation and would not discuss the government's plans for them.

Vick, 27, and three others — Tony Taylor, 34, of Hampton, Va.; Purnell A. Peace, 35, of Virginia Beach; and Quanis L. Phillips, 28, of Atlanta — pleaded not guilty last week to charges related to a dogfighting operation that the authorities said was called Bad Newz Kennels.

On Monday, Taylor pleaded guilty and agreed to help prosecutors make their case. He signed a 13-page statement confirming much of what the government stated when it indicted the four men July 17. The 18-page indictment uses graphic detail in describing the animal cruelty the men are accused of. It states that during a search of Vick's property in Surry County in April, 54 pit bulls were recovered, along with a so-called rape stand used to hold dogs for mating, and a treadmill modified for dogs.

More charges are expected in the case, and a trial has been scheduled for November. Vick, the star quarterback of the Atlanta Falcons, has been suspended indefinitely by the National Football League.

Tyrone W. Franklin, the county administrator for rural Surry County, had to sort out where the dogs were placed.

Twelve of them went to the small Surry Animal Control Pound, which is less than 10 miles from Vick's property, down a gravel road behind acres of trees. Franklin sought help from surrounding counties and shelters to take the other dogs.

The commonwealth attorney for Surry County, Gerald G. Poindexter, initially took control of the animals and had them kept alive as part of a local investigation into the dogfighting. In June, the federal government served a warrant to the county to seize control of the dogs. Surry County taxpayers had been expected to pay up to \$25,000 for the dogs' care throughout the case, according to a report in May by The Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk, Va.

Franklin said dogs normally remained in the county's pound up to 14 days. "They are either adopted or euthanized by then," he said.

The dogs have remained in those locations while the local and federal investigations have continued. No one from the public is permitted to see them, said James Smith, the county's animal control officer.

On Tuesday, the dogs were yelping from within the pound while Smith sat in his truck with a shotgun next to him. He said he did not know what would become of the animals.

"They are in good shape," he said. "They are not violent to humans."

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