

80 Dogs Killed by Berks County Kennel Owners

Shooting of animals was legal under current Pennsylvania law.

Posted: August 15, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Two commercial breeders in Pennsylvania put themselves out of the business by shooting 80 dogs at their Berks County kennels, according to state officials.

The owners, Ammon and Elmer Zimmerman of Kutztown, shot all 80 of their dogs to save costs, officials said. The Zimmermans, owners of A&J Kennel and E&A Kennel, voluntarily surrendered their licenses July 29 after killing the dogs. Efforts to reach the owners were unsuccessful as of Thursday.

"They decided that they no longer wanted to be in business, and they did not want to take care of the dogs," said Chris Ryder, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture spokesman. "They felt the easiest and least expensive way to do so was to shoot them."

The killing of the dogs, which is legal under current Pennsylvania law, was done to avoid seeking medical attention for the dogs suffering with fleas and sores, officials said. Dog wardens inspected E&A Kennel on July 24, noting several violations for kennel sanitation and maintenance.

Wardens also noted fleas and fly sores on 39 of the dogs and ordered veterinary checks. Officials issued four citations for violations and planned to confirm the health exams during a follow-up visit.

The wardens learned on July 29 that the kennel owners chose to destroy the dogs. "The kennels have been dismantled, and the dogs are unfortunately dead," Ryder said Thursday, adding, "The shooting of the dogs is not a crime."

Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff said that until the state's dog law is changed, kennel owners may continue to kill their dogs for any reason as they see fit, "even if it is simply to save money."

Legislation introduced in May would allow only veterinarians to euthanize dogs in commercial breeding kennels, defined as those that sell dogs to a dealer or pet shop or that sell more than 60 dogs per year. House Bill 2525 seeks to strengthen current dog laws and provide higher standards for the care of dogs in commercial kennels.

"The legislature has an opportunity to pass this important legislation this fall, and they should – as doing so will assure that this activity will be illegal in Pennsylvania commercial breeding kennels moving forward," Wolff said.