

Dog Kennel Operator Ordered to Stand Trial

Worker at Almost Heaven kennel found violating new Pennsylvania Dog Law.

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The new Pennsylvania Dog Law is serving to protect dogs in kennels, as demonstrated by two recent decisions by a Lehigh County District Justice regarding Almost Heaven kennel, according to the state Department of Agriculture.

The kennel owner, Derbe Eckhart, was ordered to stand trial on charges of violating terms of his Feb. 6 kennel license refusal, which kept him from operating a boarding kennel. Attempts to reach Eckhart by e-mail and phone were unsuccessful.

Eckhart, to be scheduled for trial in the Lehigh court, was found to be boarding dogs Feb. 11 when state dog wardens inspected the kennel, according to the department. Violations after a license has been refused are third degree misdemeanors under the state's new dog law.

In addition, April Welter, a worker at the kennel, was found guilty of summary charges for running a kennel without a license. In January, she presented herself as the kennel owner on the kennel's website and to an undercover dog warden, the department said. She has not, however, had a kennel license in the state.

Welter will have 30 days to appeal. The state's Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement refused the 2009 kennel license application for Almost Heaven after an October 2008 inspection showed significant violations of the dog law.

Jessie Smith, the state's special deputy secretary for dog law enforcement, said previous versions of the dog law allowed kennel owners to operate for extended periods of time, even after having their kennel license revoked or refused. "The new law prohibits kennels in that situation from obtaining new dogs, breeding or boarding, so that they cannot operate as usual during a lengthy appeal process," Smith said.