

CRUELTY INVESTIGATIONS

Ten Top Tips for Good Photography, Videography

Document incidents of animal cruelty and neglect more effectively by following these helpful hints.

By Geoffrey L. Handy

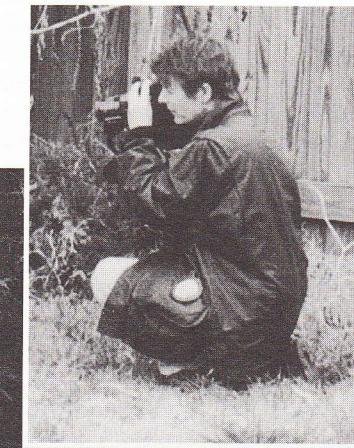
Cruelty investigators for the SPCA of Texas in Dallas have taken to wearing baseball caps on the job. No, they're not being unprofessional. Instead, they're practicing how to use \$2,000 worth of undercover surveillance equipment purchased with a donation from Mary Kay Cosmetics. The equipment includes a video camera small enough to fit inside a baseball cap and a 9-inch Magnavox television with built-in VCR that operates off a car cigarette lighter.

Certainly, advanced technology is a good friend to the cruelty investigator. In no area of investigations is this more true than in recording the results of cruelty and neglect. As an investigator, you probably often wish you had the ability to make prosecutors and judges actually feel for a moment the suffering of an animal. Thanks to photography and videography, you can at least make them see and sometimes hear that suffering. And the ability to do this can mean the difference between winning and losing a case.

Fortunately, unlike high-tech surveillance equipment, a camera and camcorder (used if not new) are within the budgets of most humane agencies. Once you have them, the trick is learning how to use them effectively. Here are some tips:

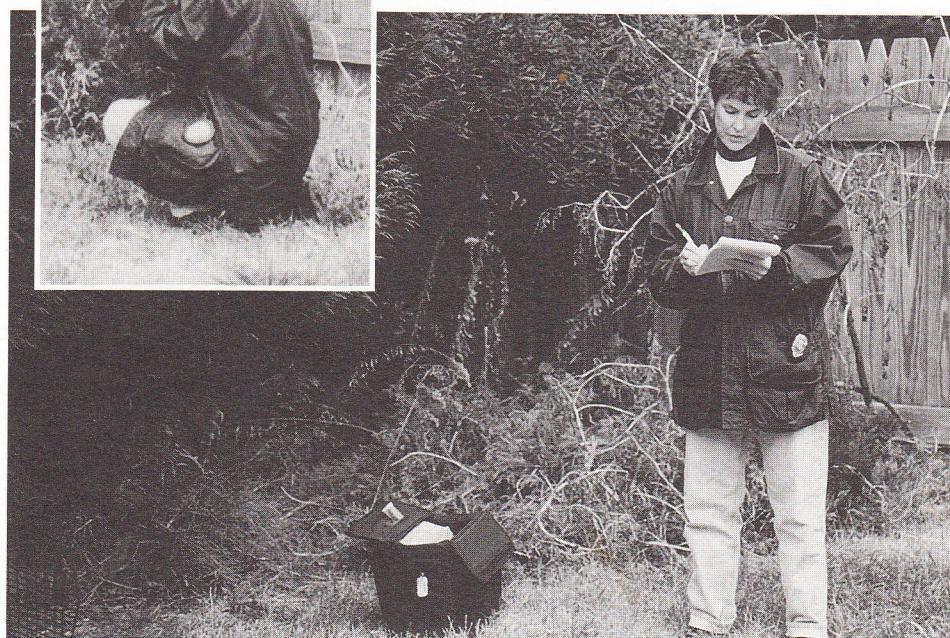
1. Practice, practice, practice. Shoot several rolls of film, write down the various film speeds and settings you use, and review the prints to see what worked and what didn't. Practice videotaping and then play back the tape. And remember the old saying: When all else fails, read the instructions.

2. Check with local prosecutors and judges to find out what they like and what they don't. Ask questions: Do they have any special requirements or preferences, such as including dates on photographs, requiring certification by the developer that the photos were not altered in any way, or a preference that at least one photograph shows the investigator on the scene? (To be on the safe side, you should take those steps anyway.) Also, find out ahead of time whether the courtroom is equipped with video and other equipment necessary to show your taped evidence; don't just assume that it is.



3. Tailor the mix of photographs and video to the case at hand. Photographs (or "stills") are generally best for stark images, whereas video is best for capturing movements and sounds. For a ten-month-old German shepherd with a chain embedded in her neck, for example, a few color stills are your best bet. For an animal who vocalizes his distress, supplement the stills with a minute or two of video. For animal collector cases, shoot video of animals running around in squalid conditions (remember to bring your own lighting), and add stills of individual animals, piles of feces, and other signs of neglect. If you can't take both a camera and camcorder with you, remember that a 35-millimeter camera is still the preferred tool for recording the results of cruelty and neglect. Video should supplement stills, not replace them. →

Make notes about important details while at the scene, and plan your video-taking strategy carefully.



John Mantis/APSFs of Orange County (NC)

4. For stills, use a combination of color film and black-and-white film. Most investigators use color print film because it best depicts situations as they are and vividly shows animals suffering from open flesh wounds. Black-and-white images, on the other hand, are particularly effective for revealing conditions such as protruding ribs and for depicting the bleak "mood" of cruelty and neglect. They're also preferred by local newspapers.

5. Use an instant camera (or camcorder) during the preliminary stages of an investigation. Polaroid™ or other instant cameras are great for the early stages of an investigation—such as for getting pictures right away to show a superior officer or to show a judge when re-

questing a search or seizure warrant. But the pictures are usually of poor photographic quality, so you should not use instant cameras to document the case. Camcorders are also helpful early in an investigation.

6. For stills, use a 35-millimeter camera to document the case. Because of the high-quality images they produce, 35-mm cameras remain the investigator's camera of choice for just about all documentation purposes. 400-speed film is considered the most versatile for shooting in a variety of lighting conditions. If plenty of light is available, use 200-speed film or even 100-speed film to provide sharper detail.

7. Don't scrimp on the number of stills you shoot. By taking plenty of photos, you can choose the best ones to present your case. Save money by asking your photo processor to provide proof sheets (also called contact sheets) so that you can review the images and select the best ones to print. Eight-by-ten-inch prints are the best size to use in court because they are easy to handle and show the most detail for judges and juries.

8. Plan your video-taking strategy carefully. Plan your moves in advance, move the camera slowly and steadily, and use the camcorder's playback feature to make sure the lighting is adequate. Avoid the common mistake of panning and zooming too quickly and frequently. Remember that jokes or inflammatory remarks made in frustration may be recorded and can prove extremely damaging to both your credibility and your case. All the stills and videotapes you take for a case become part of the evidence.

9. Shoot "wide" shots first and "tight" shots second. This means that you should start by taking photographs or video of the broad scene first (such as the outside of a house or an entire backyard or field), then take progressively more detailed shots of the situation and the animals in it. Similarly, when photographing an animal with a visible wound, take a picture of the animal, then shoot close-ups of the actual wound. It's also a good idea to write down important details about each scene or animal you photograph so that you'll remember them later.

10. When photographing individual animals rescued in a multiple-animal cruelty case, position each animal consistently. This makes it possible, after the animals have been rehabilitated, to photograph them in the same position and general lighting for a powerful before-and-after effect. In addition, have someone hold a card next to each animal containing information such as the date and the identification number assigned to the animal. (Write clearly with a broad-tipped marker so that the words will be legible in the photo.) If possible, use a camera that records dates on the photographs; this technology is especially effective for before-and-after shots.

For details on these tips and more, read the articles on photography and videography in the April and May 1991 issues of *Shelter Sense*. To obtain copies of these articles, simply write, call, fax, or e-mail *Animal Sheltering magazine* and ask for them.

Harry Brodhead/UCSPCA/NYSHA



For before-and-after shots, photograph animals in similar positions and lighting for more dramatic and realistic comparison.

Sondra Woodfine/UCSPCA/NYSHA

