

Dogfighting Fact Sheet

1. What is dogfighting?

Dogfighting is a brutal blood sport "contest". Two or more dogs—specifically bred, conditioned, and trained to fight—are placed in a pit (generally a small arena enclosed by plywood walls) to fight each other for the spectators' entertainment and financial gain (i.e. gambling). Fights average nearly an hour in length and some last more than two hours. Dogfights end when one of the dogs will not or cannot continue. In addition to these dogfights, there are reports of an increase in unorganized impromptu street fights in urban areas. Dogfights are on the rise again.

2. How does it cause animal suffering?

The injuries inflicted and sustained by dogs participating in dogfights are frequently severe, even fatal. The American pit bull terriers used in the majority of these fights have been specifically bred and trained for fighting and are unrelenting in their attempts to overcome their opponents. With their extremely powerful jaws they are able to inflict severe bruising, deep puncture wounds and broken bones.

Dogs used in these events often die of blood loss, shock, dehydration, exhaustion, or infection hours or even days after the fight. Other animals are often sacrificed as well. Some owners train their dogs for fights using smaller animals such as cats, rabbits or small dogs. These "bait" animals are often stolen pets or animals obtained through "free to good home" advertisements.

A commonly propagated idea is that American pit bull terriers do not feel pain. This is known as "gameness": a trait referring to an animal's tendency to ignore discomfort and continue/complete a task. American pit bull terriers, while they **do** feel pain, will often continue fighting despite injuries as severe as broken legs.

3. Are there other concerns?

Yes. Numerous law enforcement raids have unearthed many disturbing facets of this illegal "sport." Young children are sometimes present at the events, which can promote insensitivity to animal suffering, enthusiasm for violence and a lack of respect for the law. Illegal gambling is the norm at dogfights. Dog owners and spectators wager thousands of dollars on their favorites. Firearms and other weapons have been found at dogfights because of the large amounts of cash present. And dogfighting has been connected to other kinds of violence—even homicide, according to newspaper reports. In addition, illegal drugs are often sold and used at dogfights.

4. What other effects does the presence of dogfighting have on people and animals in a community?

Dogs used for fighting have been bred for many generations to be dangerously aggressive toward other animals. The presence of these dogs in a community increases the risk of attacks not only on other animals but also on people. Children are especially at risk, because their small size may cause a fighting dog to perceive a child as a target, especially if they run or move brusquely.

5. Why should dog fighting be an indictable offense?

There are several compelling reasons. Because dogfighting yields such large profits for participants, the minor penalties associated with summary convictions are not a

sufficient deterrent. Dogfighters merely absorb these fines as part of the cost of doing business. The cruelty inherent in dogfighting should be punished by more than a slap on the hand. Dogfighting is not a spur-of-the-moment act; it is a premeditated and cruel practice.

Those involved in dog fighting go to extensive lengths to avoid detection by law enforcement, so investigations can be difficult, dangerous, and expensive. Law enforcement officials are more inclined to investigate dogfighting if it is indictable.

6. Should being a spectator also be an indictable offence?

Yes. Spectators provide much of the profit and incentive associated with dogfighting. The money generated by admission fees and gambling helps keep this "sport" alive. Because dogfights are illegal and therefore not widely publicized, spectators do not merely happen upon a fight; they seek it out. They are willing participants who support a cruel and criminal activity through their paid admission and attendance.

7. What can I do to help stop dog fighting?

Please write to your MP and insist that all dogfighting offences be made indictable with stiffer penalties, longer jail times and heftier fines.

We encourage you also to write letters to the media to increase public awareness of the dangers of dogfighting and to law enforcement officials or prosecutors and judges to urge them to take the issue seriously.

If you suspect that dogfighting is going on in your own neighborhood, alert your local law enforcement agency immediately and tell us about it by emailing info@hsicanada.ca.