

Dog-fighting DNA database established to help crack down on animal cruelty

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The nation's first criminal dog-fighting DNA database has been established by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Humane Society of Missouri and the Louisiana SPCA, and will be maintained at the University of California, Davis, Veterinary Genetics Laboratory.

Known as the Canine CODIS (Combined DNA Index System), the database is designed to help the [criminal justice system](#) investigate and prosecute dog-fighting cases.

“Dog fighting is a multimillion dollar criminal enterprise that leads to the cruel treatment and deaths of thousands of dogs nationwide every year,” said Tim Rickey, the ASPCA’s senior director of Field Investigation and Response and former Animal Cruelty Task Force director at the Humane Society of Missouri. “This database is an unprecedented and vital component in the fight against animal cruelty and will allow us to strengthen cases against animal abusers and seek justice for their victims,” he said

The Canine CODIS contains individual DNA profiles from dogs that have been seized during dog-fighting investigations and from unidentified samples collected at suspected dog-fighting venues. This includes 400 original and initial samples of dog DNA supplied by the Humane Society of Missouri and collected from dogs that were seized in July 2009 during the nation’s largest dog-fighting raid. The database is similar to the FBI’s human CODIS, a computerized archive that stores

DNA profiles from criminal offenders and crime scenes and is used in criminal and missing-person investigations.

[DNA analysis](#) and matching through the canine database, available for a fee only to law enforcement agencies, will help to identify relationships between dogs. This will enable investigators to establish connections between breeders, trainers and dog-fight operators. Blood collected from dog fighting sites also will be searched against the Canine CODIS database to identify the source.

Beth Wictum, director of the forensics unit of the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory in UC Davis' School of Veterinary Medicine, said that the lab has one of the largest sample databases in the world, which is crucial for estimating the rarity of a DNA profile. She noted that the Canine CODIS database is unique because it includes many more DNA markers than are normally tested.

“That provides greater power when calculating match probability or assigning parentage,” Wictum said. “When these cases come to trial, it’s important to make your strongest case. The DNA evidence not only establishes links between owners, breeders and dog fighting sites, it also tells a story,” she noted.

“We can tie blood spatter on pit walls and clothing, or blood trails found outside of the pit, to a specific dog and tell his story for him,” Wictum said. “We become the voice for those victims.”

Provided by UC Davis

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