

DOG FIGHTING AND THE LAW

**West Lafayette Police Department
Animal Control**



DOG FIGHTING LAWS

Dog fighting is illegal in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and the interstate transportation of dogs for fighting purposes is prohibited by the federal Animal Welfare Act. 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have made dog fighting a felony offense; 47 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands prohibit the possession of dogs for fighting; and 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands prohibit being a spectator at a dogfight.

Indiana considers promoting or staging an animal fight, using an animal in a fight, or attending an animal fight having an animal in the person's possession to be a class D felony subject to 1 and a half years imprisonment and a fine up to \$10,000. It is also a class D felony to possess animal fighting paraphernalia and possess, harbor, or train an animal that has scars, wounds or injuries consistent with an animal fight knowingly or intentionally purchasing or possessing an animal for the purpose of fighting or being a spectator at an animal fight a Class A misdemeanor and can carry a punishment of up to 1 year imprisonment and a fine up to \$5,000. Possession of animal fighting paraphernalia is a Class B misdemeanor and can carry a punishment of up to 180 days imprisonment and a fine up to \$1,000. (Ref: Burns Ind. Code Ann. § 35-46-3-4, § 35-46-3-8 to § 35-46-3-10)

Since 1976, federal law has prohibited transporting animals for fighting purposes across state lines or national borders. But federal authorities have pursued no more than a handful of dog fighting and cock-fighting cases, despite repeated violations of the law across the country, frequent tips from informants, and requests to assist with state and local prosecutions. That's largely because the crime of animal fighting carries only misdemeanor penalties under federal law. Prosecutors are reluctant to take such cases, and even when they do, the small fines and risk of minimal jail time do not serve as meaningful deterrents for those engaged in high-stakes animal fighting enterprises—they're considered merely a "cost of doing business." With the federal law and prosecution for dog fighting being a misdemeanor, it is more likely to obtain a conviction under Indiana law.

DOG FIGHTING INVESTIGATION

Indicators of Dog Fighting

A vast number of indicators for dog fighting can typically be observed during routine patrol or surveillance. Wooden privacy fences are very prevalent to help contain the dogs plus obscure training devices. Tires or animal hides hanging from trees help the pit bull dog strengthen its bite. Dogs can often hang for hours from these items. Heavy metal logging chains are utilized to help restrain the dog plus build stronger neck muscles. Beware of dog signs are almost always observed either on a front door or chain link fence. Treadmills, similar to those used in gyms, can be kept in a garage or side yard and are used for the dog's cardiovascular training. A treadmill, or "jenny," is a device similar to a hot walker used in the racehorse industry. Harnessed to a spoke projecting from a rotating central shaft, the dog chases a small bait animal, such as a cat, ahead of the dog. After exercising, the dog is sometimes allowed to finish off the bait animal as a reward. Hanging scales can be observed and are utilized to weigh the dog. Various veterinary medications and supplies are typically present due to self-medication by the owner. Most fighters do not take their dogs to veterinarians for fear of detection due to scarring on the dogs.



The fighting dogs will have abrasions and puncture wounds to the head, muzzle, chest, and front legs. If the dog is severely injured in a fight, the owner will usually shoot the dog. Dog fights may last up to 2 hours before 1 dog dies, or refuses to fight.

Indicators of Dog Fighting

There are 3 categories of Dog Fighters: Professional, Hobbyist, and Street Fighters. These individuals take their “sport” very seriously. Pedigree’s, training, and conditioning all play an important part in the preparation of a pit bull for an impending fight. The twenty or so day's prior to fight, known as a "keep," is no different than a training regimen for an athlete. The dogs are typically placed on a strict diet in addition to their strength and cardiovascular training. The dog's weight is closely monitored so as to meet fight weight, similar to that of a human wrestling match. Fighters have been known to give their dogs suppositories the day of a fight to make weight.



The above photo is that of a typical dog fighting kennel. Dog fighters may have as few as 3 dogs, or as many as 25. Most of the dogs will be tethered with large log chains weighing up 40 pounds. The weight of the chain is to build up the dogs neck muscles.

Dog fighting typically is associated with other crimes such as drug trafficking, firearms possession, gang involvement, and gambling are just a few of the peripheral crimes tied to the fighting of pit bull dogs. Some studies have purportedly shown a correlation between dog fighting and domestic violence.

Indicators of Dog Fighting

Items that indicate Dog Fighting:

1. **Treadmill:** The treadmill is used to condition the dog for stamina. The dog may run for up to an hour and in many cases a live animal such as a cat will be placed at the end of the treadmill as a bait animal. After the dog has completed the run, the bait animal is given to the dog as a reward. The treadmill may be home made, bought as a commercial dog treadmill, or a treadmill you would use at home.



2. **Break Stick:** A break stick is used to separate dogs during a fight. The stick is placed into the dog's mouth to pry the dog's mouth open. The stick will be made of different materials such as plastic, or wood. The stick will have a brown colorization at the end (blood) with bite marks.



Indicators of Dog Fighting

Items that indicate Dog Fighting:

- 3. Dog fighting magazines, books, trophy's, and ribbons.**
- 4. High protein dog food, large amounts of deer meat and vitamin supplements.**
- 5. Veterinary and medical supplies such as antibiotics, sutors, staples, lactic-ringers (for blood loss). Fighting dog owners will treat their own dogs due to a fear of being reported by a veterinarian.**
- 6. Steroids: Steroids are used to build up the dogs muscle mass.**
- 7. Spring Poles: A spring pole is used to strengthen the dog's bite, and neck muscles. A rope is tied to a tree or pole with a piece of rubber or leather tied to the end. The dog may hang from the rope for up to an hour.**
- 8. Dog fighting videos and photographs.**
- 9. The dog owner may have dog fighting tattoos.**
- 10. Dog fighting flyers or inventions.**
- 11. Hanging Scales: Hanging scales are used to keep track of the dog's weight during training.**
- 12. Dog fighters will steal family pets to use as bait, or sparing animals.**
- 13. Dog fighting ring: A dog fighting ring in most cases is made of wood and approximately 2 feet high and 20 feet square. The interior of the ring is covered with carpet so the dogs have a good footing.**

If you have 3 or more of these indicators, it is more than likely the person you are dealing with is a dog fighter.

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