

Animal advocacy nonprofit files complaint against Weld Sheriff's Office investigation into cruelty case

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PUBLISHED: February 20, 2022



John Lashmet's greyhound farm in Greeley was filmed on Weld County Animal Control Officer Sue Booker's body-camera footage on July 8 and 9. Booker investigated the property after allegations of animal cruelty surfaced against Lashmet, who was captured by GREY2K USA allegedly live lure training with his dogs.

An animal advocacy group is accusing Weld County law enforcement officers of unprofessional behavior and failing to investigate a cruelty case, after an officer closed an investigation into a Greeley man accused of training dogs in a way that's cruel to rabbits.

In June 2020, a GREY2K USA Worldwide employee filmed what the organization says is four adults and a minor partaking in live-lure training on John Lashmet's greyhound farm outside Greeley. The video shows 15 greyhounds were purposely released to chase and maul five rabbits. A Division of Racing Events report obtained by GREY2K showed Lashmet admitted to the banned training practice on video captured by the division's investigator in December.

"In specifically addressing the videos that were related to the case, Lashmet admitted that live-lure training had been occurring in these videos," the investigator's report said. Lashmet's minor business license expired on Dec. 26, according to Suzanne Karrer, the Colorado Department of Revenue's public information officer, which was three weeks after he admitted to live-lure training.

West Virginia, Arkansas and Iowa are the only states in the country that allow greyhound racing and have active tracks, but Arkansas and Iowa are ending practices at the end of this year. Lashmet's case is being investigated by racing regulators in West Virginia since live-lure training is deemed illegal, according to The Denver Post.

"This is the resolution that we hoped for," GREY2K founder Christine Dorchak wrote in an email.

The Tribune attempted to contact Lashmet several times for a comment, but he never responded.

GREY2K, Weld County Sheriff's Office investigations

GREY2K investigates greyhound farms and racing kennels while looking into the cruelty of the dog racing industry across the country. In 2014, GREY2K played a part in making dog racing in Colorado illegal because of practices like live-lure training.

Live-lure training is the use of small animals, commonly rabbits, to enhance a chase instinct in greyhounds, which usually results in a painful death for the lure animal. This type of training dangles animals before the dogs, drags them on ropes in front of dogs or sets them loose to be attacked by the dogs.

Lashmet and his wife, Jill, breed dogs for racing in multiple states, including West Virginia and Arkansas. In 2019, Lashmet's farm housed a total of 150 greyhounds, according to GREY2K.

Dorchak said live-lure training is illegal because it ties in with race-fixing, in addition to its brutal nature. The nonprofit first took its evidence against Lashmet to the Colorado Division of Racing Events in June.



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Enforcing animal cruelty laws

Colorado's anti-cruelty law states that "a person commits cruelty to animals if he or she knowingly, recklessly, or with criminal negligence overdrives, overloads, overworks, torments, deprives of necessary sustenance, unnecessarily or cruelly beats, allows to be housed in a manner that results in chronic or repeated serious physical harm."

A first-time animal abuse offense is a misdemeanor with a sentence that includes six to 18 months in jail, a \$500 to \$5,000 fine or both. Aggravated animal cruelty — knowingly torturing an animal, needlessly mutilating an animal or needlessly killing an animal — is a felony.

Dorchak believes the assigned officers "failed to investigate the matter and were objectively derelict" in their responsibilities during the Lashmet investigation. In the eyes of the GREYK team, Lashmet has gone unpunished for animal cruelty for 30 years and the "corruption" found in the sheriff's office is not going to help put a stop to the racing industry's cruelty, Dorchak said.

As a result, Dorchak filed a complaint with Attorney General Phil Weiser using the law enforcement records and body-camera footage obtained by GREY2K to showcase the unprofessional behavior and dereliction among the officers.

"At best, their 'investigation' was conducted in a way that was irresponsible and unprofessional," Dorchak wrote to Weiser. "At worst it is a case of official misconduct that warrants disciplinary action."

In addition, a 2019 bill was passed into law proclaiming the severity of engaging in the torture of animals by making animal cruelty a federal crime, meaning violators are subjected to a fine, imprisonment for no more than seven years or both.

Lashmet's potentially illegal acts could result in the involvement of federal law against animal cruelty due to his breeding and racing operations using interstate commerce, according to Dorchak.

Dorchak stated she is waiting on the next steps from the attorney general's office before taking things to a federal agency, but the organization plans to pursue this level of enforcement.

"This isn't just a matter of, 'Oh, let's track down some corrupt sheriff's office,' **this is about the lives and deaths of animals,**" Dorchak said.