

DEA Investigates PETA; Criminal Drug Charges Possible

By Tim McGlone
The Virginian-Pilot 5/24/2007

NORFOLK - The Drug Enforcement Administration is investigating how PETA handles euthanasia drugs.

DEA officials said the investigation of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is administrative at this point, but it could lead to criminal charges if serious violations are uncovered.

PETA attorney Jeff Kerr called the action "heavy-handed" Thursday but added that the non profit group is cooperating with the DEA.

DEA agents searched PETA's Front Street offices on April 18, making copies of training manuals and competency certificates on 17 employees including Director Ingrid Newkirk, according to an inspection warrant filed in U.S. District Court.

Those **papers** had been filed under seal but were opened earlier this month and obtained by The Virginian-Pilot this week. An affidavit explaining the DEA's motive for the investigation remains sealed, however.

The DEA action comes on the heels of a criminal trial in North Carolina where two PETA employees, Adria Hinkle and Andrew Cook, were accused of animal cruelty and littering after they were caught dumping euthanized animals in a shopping center trash bin.

A jury acquitted both of animal cruelty charges but convicted them of littering. The conviction has been appealed.

PETA euthanized nearly 2,000 animals in 2005, the last year figures were available from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. PETA says euthanasia is necessary to ease suffering in certain animals.

James Gregorius, assistant special agent in charge of the Richmond DEA office, declined to say whether the investigation is related to the North Carolina case.

"The whole thing is still under investigation," he said. "We're still working on it."

The Richmond DEA office handles "diversion investigations" for most of the state. Typical cases include monitoring **physicians'** prescription patterns to ensure narcotics aren't being diverted for illicit purposes, according to the DEA. Veterinarians and animal shelters that administer drugs also fall into this category and must be licensed by the DEA.

Officials in the U.S. attorney's office, which filed the court papers, did not respond to phone and e-mail messages from The Pilot.

Kerr said Thursday that he believes this is first time in the 11 years PETA has been at Front Street that the DEA has demanded to see its records. He said 12 DEA agents showed up that day without advance notice.

According to the court records, the DEA feared prior notification "could result in the destruction of or tampering with evidence or otherwise jeopardize the ongoing investigation."

In 2001, the FBI infiltrated PETA and tapped its phone lines in an effort to establish a link between the animal-rights group and eco-terrorists. No charges were brought against PETA.

Among the documents taken by the DEA were Hinkle's training and competency certificates, according to the federal court records. DEA officials also took copies of dispensing records since Jan. 1, 2005, for the euthanasia drugs Beuthanasia and Fatal-Plus, the insecticide Pentasol and the anesthetic Ketaject. In all, nearly 1,000 pages of records were copied.

During the North Carolina trial, a DEA agent testified that PETA did not have the authority to administer euthanasia drugs in North Carolina.

However, a PETA attorney testified that the agency had been given the green light by the DEA to euthanize animals in North Carolina.

PETA could face fines or sanctions against its license if the DEA finds any wrongdoing. Gross mishandling of drugs could lead to criminal charges.

Gregori us said the investigation has no timetable.

<http://content.hamptonroads.com/story.cfm?story=125329&ran=7944>

<http://www.topix.com/forum/football-players/michael-vick/TFCHT1N6PFDQSUU42>