

Hearing date for employees of PETA reset for Aug. 16

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Source: DARREN FREEMAN

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WINTON - BY DARREN FREEMAN THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

WINTON - A court hearing was postponed Tuesday for two PETA employees charged with animal cruelty, illegal disposal of animal carcasses and trespassing after Ahoskie police say they saw dead animals being thrown into a grocery store trash bin June 15.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys asked for more time, and the probable-cause hearing was postponed, Assistant District Attorney Donnie Taylor said. The hearing was rescheduled for Aug. 16.

Investigators were waiting for lab results on chemicals found in a van the two suspects were using when they were arrested and the results to determine the cause of death of one of the animals, Ahoskie police Detective Jeremy Roberts said.

The results came in Monday night for the chemicals found in the van, which was registered to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Roberts said.

Roberts and Taylor said they could not comment on the results.

Earlier this month, an analysis of one dead dog determined the animal was healthy at the time of death, and it had a needle mark on one leg, Roberts said. Investigators sent tissue from the dog to a lab to determine the cause of death, he said.

Police began investigating PETA because carcasses wrapped in plastic bags were found at the supermarket site in Ahoskie every Wednesday for four consecutive weeks. At least 80 animals were found.

Officers say that on June 15 they followed a van after it left Bertie County's animal shelter, staked out the garbage bins and arrested two PETA employees after officers watched them throw away animal carcasses.

They found 18 dead dogs in a bin and 13 other animal carcasses in the van.

Andrew B. Cook, 24, of Virginia Beach, and Adria J. Hinkle, 27, of Norfolk, were charged with 31 felony counts of animal cruelty, eight misdemeanor counts of illegal disposal of dead animals and one count of trespassing. Both were released on \$35,000 bail.

PETA started picking up animals in northeastern North Carolina in 2001 when a caller informed the group of poor conditions in shelters, according to a written apology PETA president Ingrid Newkirk sent to Bertie County officials.

Bertie and Northampton County officials and one Ahoskie veterinarian who said he gave PETA three healthy cats that were found dead in Ahoskie on June 15 said they believed that adoptable animals would find new homes, while sick, injured and wild animals would be euthanized.

In an apology letter to Northampton County officials, Newkirk wrote that dumping animals in trash bins "is wrong and in violation of PETA policy."

PETA typically puts down animals in Norfolk and cremates the carcasses, Newkirk said in a June 17 press conference.

"We are not in the home finding business, although it is certainly true that **we do find homes from time to time** for the kind of animals people are looking for," Newkirk wrote to Northampton County officials. "Our service is to provide a peaceful and painless death to animals who no one wants."

Although Newkirk sent apology letters to Bertie and Northampton officials, both counties cut ties to PETA pending the trials of Cook and Hinkle. The counties are now euthanizing animals without help from PETA.

If the hearing takes place Aug. 16, a judge would decide whether there is enough evidence to proceed with the case, Taylor said.

PETA, which is paying legal fees for the two charged in the case, suspended Hinkle for 90 days and did not discipline Cook.

Cook, who was hired to work for PETA's online department, "was a ride-along" when he was arrested, according to an e-mail from Daphna Nachminovitch, director of PETA's domestic animal and wildlife department.

Newkirk on June 16 said of Hinkle: "She's the Mother Teresa of animals."

Reach Darren Freeman at (252) 338-0150 or darren.freeman@pilotonline.com.

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