

Woman's toes eaten by animals

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Posted: 12/21/2010 11:48:19 PM MST

LAS CRUCES - Seven small dogs are in quarantine at the city-county animal shelter after their 98-year-old owner's toes were eaten as she slept, officials said Tuesday.

County officials, however, said the woman's toes might have been eaten by rodents in her Berino home, on San Benito Street.

Two pugs, four chihuahuas and a heeler puppy are being observed at the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley for signs of rabies because of the incident, confirmed shelter director Beth Vesco-Mock.

Criminal charges are not being pursued at the moment, said Curtis Childress, head of the county's animal cruelty investigation team, because it doesn't appear anyone did anything wrong.

"Realistically, we don't know if it was the dogs," he said. "There (appear to be) rats in the house."

The victim, who is bed-ridden and lacks feeling in her extremities, was transported to a hospital in Las Cruces on Monday after a care-giver discovered the injuries to her toes, Childress said.

"They have mice and roaches (in the house)," he said. "That's the impression I get, that it's not the cleanest conditions. (But) there wasn't anything that (the caregiver) did wrong. These dogs ... have got food, they're healthy, plump, no appearance of not being healthy at all."

Most dogs, he said, "generally just don't do that."

Vesco-Mock said the animals, plus an eighth dog not believed to be involved in the incident, were turned in to the shelter by the county animal control department around 11 a.m. Monday.

"When I found out about it, I was in shock," she said of the woman's injuries. "We'll treat it as a dog bite, in case they have rabies to infect the lady."

Vesco-Mock said the dogs appeared to be in "generally OK" condition, and, during intake at the shelter, didn't appear aggressive.

As with other dogs that have bitten people, the dogs will be held for 10 days before the owner will be given a chance to reclaim them. If she doesn't want them back, they could be evaluated for adoption.

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