



Operator of Miami-Dade County slaughterhouse arrested

Raul Fernandez faces 7 counts of animal cruelty

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Man accused of running illegal slaughter house arrested

MIAMI -

The Miami-Dade County state attorney's office and Miami-Dade police said Wednesday they have arrested an operator of an illegal slaughterhouse in Miami-Dade County.

Raul Fernandez, also known as "Freaky," is facing seven counts of animal cruelty, all third-degree felonies.

The state attorney's office has confirmed the arrest is related to undercover surveillance video provided by Animal Recovery Mission.

Several months ago ARM provided Local 10 exclusive access to that video.

ARM dubbed it "Operation Noche Buena" because it launched the undercover operation on Christmas Eve.

Richard Couto of ARM has been monitoring this particular property for quite some time.

The video depicts the illegal handling and slaughter of various pigs.

In one video, it shows a pig being boiled alive. In another, a pig is bludgeoned to death with a sledgehammer. In yet another, the workers can be heard laughing as they shoot a pig to stun it, stab it with a knife and then jam a hook through its jaw while the pig is still alive and drag it to the main slaughter area about 150 feet away.

Couto told Local 10 they shot several undercover videos because they wanted to gather enough evidence for the operators to face felonies. Couto said shooting the video was difficult for his team, but they believed it was the best way to ensure operators would face prison time.

He also hopes it will send a message to other illegal slaughterhouse operators.

The state attorney's office confirms Fernandez was operating at the same location Miami-Dade County had moved to shut down in 2010 for similar complaints.

Property records show the land is owned by Carlos and Mirtha Casas.

In 2010, Miami-Dade County building records show two cases were opened involving "unsafe structures" and "working without permit." Several code violations were also issued. The property owners faced fines and most of the structures were demolished, but they were never criminally charged or faced jail time, Couto said.

Couto said they learned a lesson from that experience.

"We learned about the need for evidence," he said.

That is why when a drone Couto launched over the property appeared to show what he thought may be illegal slaughter activity happening on the same site, he sent undercover team members there posing as customers. He knew he had to catch operators in the act to aid law enforcement and give prosecutors the evidence they needed to file felony animal cruelty charges.

The state attorney's office said it is still investigating. No charges have been filed against the property owners or the workers depicted in much of the released undercover surveillance video.

ARM also captured video of a goat that appeared to be so sick it could not stand on its own. They said that goat was sold to a customer.

Couto believes people who purchase animals from these sorts of illegal slaughterhouses may have no idea the level of contamination that could exist.

They also captured a screen shot of a horrified young girl forced to watch the slaughter of pigs by her caretakers.