

Slaughterhouse Shutdown, Operator Arrested For Animal Cruelty

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MIAMI (CBSMiami) — Miami-Police have arrested a man accused of operating an illegal slaughterhouse in unincorporated Miami-Dade.

Police arrested Raul Fernandez, 53, also known as “Freaky,” on seven charges of animal cruelty which are third degree felonies.

According to police, the site, located at 17701 NW 137th Avenue, was illegally slaughtering animals and was doing so in a cruel and painful manner.

The Animal Recovery Mission (ARM), a non-Profit investigative animal welfare organization based in Miami Beach, said undercover videos were taken on December 24, 2013 when their personnel entered onto the property posing as customers. According to police, another video was taken on December 30, 2013.

Witnesses of certain incidents told police they saw animals being shot, stabbed, and gutted while they were alive. According to police, the witnesses said they also saw animals being beaten, hit with a sledge-hammer in the head, being dragged by their mouth and other cruel behaviors.

“The horrors that took place behind me were pretty extreme,” said Richard Couto, the founder of A.R.M. and the lead investigator. “You are talking about animals being gutted and stabbed to death and boiled alive and drowned in boiling water.”

“Hooks were inserted in some of the animals’ mouths and they were dragged 200 feet to a butcher zone,” Couto told CBS4’s Peter D’Oench. “These were really heinous acts. And children as young as 8 were brought in with the customers to witness the brutality to these animals. This is some of the worst brutality ever recorded in Florida.”

“The people who did this were monsters,” said Couto.

Couto was referring to surveillance video which allegedly shows a pig being dragged with a hook through his jaw while the animal was alive.

The group posted a video on YouTube of some of the alleged acts. Please be aware, the film is very graphic in nature.

ARM operatives said they documented children as young as 8-years old being forced to witness the alleged acts upon the animals.

Hundreds of animals including pigs, sheep and goats were allegedly sold, according to ARM.

The group said many of them were in distress and were provided little to no food and water, and were extremely sick. All of the animals were allegedly sold for human consumption to the public, according to ARM.

Couto said the same site off Okeechobee Road was raided by investigators in 2009 and 2010. Couto said 70 illegal slaughterhouse operations were shut down.

“In 2009 and 2010 we saw how those animals were being killed with sledgehammers,” Couto said, adding that facilities at that site were torn down at the time.

“When the Florida Legislature created the animal cruelty statute, they intended to end such brutal activities as were occurring at this illegal slaughterhouse,” commented Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. “No legitimate slaughterhouse operator or any self-respecting farmer would treat his livestock in such a ghastly manner.”

An investigation into the case continues.

Records show Fernandez was on probation after convictions for trafficking in cannabis and possession of a place for trafficking a “manufactured substance.”

Couto said he believes more charges and more arrests are possible. He said each count of animal cruelty in such cases can lead to five years in prison.

Neighbors said they were horrified.

“This is nasty,” said neighbor Javier Vazquez. “This is bad what they were doing. I didn’t know anything about this.”