

Dogs living in trailer raises outcry, but breaks no law

By **Adam Leech**

aleech@seacoastonline.com

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PORTSMOUTH — A horse trailer that has housed four dogs outside a local hotel for more than three months does not violate any state or city animal cruelty laws, police said.

Since at least January, a horse trailer has been parked outside the Comfort Inn on Lafayette Road and provided shelter to four huskies. The dogs are fed and walked daily, while the owners, who are from Florida originally, try to find a house on the Seacoast.

Police Capt. Steve DuBois said the situation is temporary, but has been lengthened because the owners have had a few deals on a new home fall through. They are hoping to move by month's end.

"Right now, they are not in violation," DuBois said. "Obviously, this is not an ideal situation, but the owners are in the process of bettering their situation and have been working with (animal control officer Patti Tate)."

Police were first made aware of the situation by a complaint from a concerned citizen in January. Four other complaints were filed since.

Animal cruelty laws require shelter to "be structurally sound and have an area within to afford the dog the ability to stand up, turn around and lie down, and be of proportionate size as to allow the natural body heat of the dog to be retained." DuBois said the situation is adequate for the dogs.

"It's no different than someone having a dog outside (in) their back yard," said DuBois, adding the hotel has made accommodations for the dogs during particularly bad weather conditions.

In a letter to the Herald from Connie Netto of Scarborough, Maine, she said she and her husband stayed at the Comfort Inn recently and were "horrified" to discover the dogs in the trailer as they walked by. After hearing the hotel manager explain the situation, she said they checked out immediately and contacted the police.

"We couldn't in good conscience sleep 50 feet away from this trailer. It was too sad," Netto said. "I think this is total neglect, if not inhumane, for these dogs to be confined to this small place for months. I am so sick to think that these poor animals have been in this trailer for the coldest part of the winter."

A manager at Comfort Inn said the hotel would not comment on the situation. The owners did not return a request for comment.

Steven Sprowl, manager of the N.H. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Field Services Division, said he has spoken with Tate about the situation and does not believe there are any violations. Huskies, he said, are a breed that loves cold weather and will often lie out in the snow rather than use shelter, even when provided.

“Because the Portsmouth Police Department has an animal control officer and investigated this matter, we do not need to take further actions and feel that Ms. Tate can do and does her job as required by both her department and state law,” Sprowl said. “If there were violations, I am confident that she would proceed to and for the betterment of the animals.”

DuBois said, because the dogs are in a heavy traffic area, including both pedestrians and vehicles, their barking has brought about quite a bit of attention.

“People are very concerned about the welfare of animals,” he said. “But we’ve been on it.”