

Cat's Death at California Jail Investigated

Sheriff's deputies allegedly shocked the cat with a Taser stun gun.

By Soraya Gutierrez

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A black cat found dead on the grounds of Theo Lacy Jail early this week in Orange County, Calif., sparked an investigation into whether jail deputies shocked the animal with a Taser stun gun. A full necropsy to be conducted by a licensed pathologist at an outside agency will determine the cause of death, said Jennifer Phillips, director of the county animal shelter.

After a preliminary probe Tuesday, a day after the carcass was taken to the shelter for examination, Phillips said she decided additional tests were necessary to satisfy the department's request for an in-depth probe into the cause of death. Results are expected in 10 to 14 days.

"To continue the investigation, we felt that was appropriate," she said. "We investigate situations all the time. They are just allegations at this point, and a necropsy is standard practice."

Meanwhile, sheriff's spokesman Ryan Burris said the department is conducting an internal investigation involving interviews with jail inmates, witnesses and jail personnel "to see what truly happened."

According to Burris, one of the inmates spoke to jail personnel about having witnessed the incident. Jail personnel then brought the allegations to the attention of command officers.

Burris said a preliminary report proved inconclusive and that the outside body of the cat did not show any trauma. "It could have just been a cat that was old," he said, adding that many wild cats are allowed to roam the jail grounds for rodent control.

"There could be a cat that was Tased," he said. "We want to make sure we are doing a full, in-depth investigation."

The department has been under heavy scrutiny, including for the October 2006 beating death of a jail inmate by fellow prisoners while deputies watched television. Grand jury transcripts of that case were released recently.