

# Charges likely in Puerto Rico pet deaths

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico --

A Puerto Rico prosecutor indicated criminal charges will be filed in the slaughter of dozens of dogs and cats seized last month from housing projects and allegedly thrown from a bridge - an incident that generated worldwide public outrage.

Prosecutor Kendys Pimentel said the findings of an investigation into the killings would be released within a few weeks. "We are sure that the final results ... will please the country," Pimentel told The Associated Press late Thursday.

Demands for justice increased this week after an Associated Press investigation showed inhumane animal killings have been routine in Puerto Rico for years.

The investigation, including eyewitness accounts from two former employees of two animal-control companies, showed that hundreds of unwanted animals have been tossed off bridges, buried alive and otherwise inhumanely disposed of for years, despite pledges to deliver adoptable strays to shelters and humanely euthanize the rest.

Pimentel said the allegations are "outrageous and worrisome," but that for now the probe is focused on the killings of the pets seized last month from three housing projects in Barceloneta.

A government contractor, Animal Control Solutions, is accused of throwing the animals from a bridge instead of delivering them to an animal shelter or humanely euthanizing them. Only a half-dozen of some 80 pets survived the 50-foot fall from the bridge, some with serious injuries.

Julio Diaz, the owner of Animal Control Solutions, denied the allegations, saying his company properly and humanely euthanized dogs and cats.

"I didn't do any of that ... I had a system of putting a dog to sleep," Diaz told the AP in an interview Friday. "It is totally false that we threw live dogs."

Diaz also denied that another company he founded, Pet Delivery, was taking pets off the streets under a contract to remove strays and was euthanizing them - but said mistakes could have been made.

"Maybe they had owners, but we didn't know," Diaz said. "If they have a collar and a dog tag that doesn't mean they have owners ... We have picked up dogs with old tags, from 2001 and 2002, that don't list telephone numbers to call."

Pimentel appealed for anyone with information about the Barceloneta pet killings or similar incidents to contact Puerto Rico's Justice Department

A residents' lawsuit alleges the pets seized in Barceloneta were injected with unknown substances while being restrained with a noose on a stick, and then "slammed" into

waiting vans. Investigators are looking into whether controlled substances were improperly used to sedate or euthanize the animals, Pimentel said.

Marcelino Sustache, an agent of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, said in a recent interview that drugs must be administered by a veterinarian or another authorized person in an approved location, such as a veterinary clinic.

(This version CORRECTS UPDATES with comment from own of animal control company. corrects spelling of prosecutor to Pimentel sted Pimental)