



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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SOUTH MIAMI-DADE BODY-BUILDING COUPLE CHARGED WITH ANIMAL CRUELTY
Three starving, neglected horses seized, turned over to South Florida SPCA
Second animal abuse offense for husband and wife

(MIAMI-DADE, FL) Miami-Dade County prosecutors have charged husband and wife body builders with animal abuse after three starving, emaciated horses were found in deplorable conditions on their rural South Miami-Dade ranch.

On Friday, October 23, 2015, Milagros (Milly) Cowan, 50, was arraigned on four misdemeanor counts of animal abuse. Her husband, Alejandro (Alex) Paez, 48, was earlier charged with the same counts and is scheduled for trial on December 16, 2015. The couple have pled not guilty.

The three horses were seized by Miami-Dade Agricultural Patrol and turned over to South Florida Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SFSPCA) on Wednesday, May 27, 2015, where they remain in rehabilitation. On the date of the horses' seizure, owner Alex Paez was charged with animal cruelty and was given a promise to appear (PTA). According to Laurie Waggoner, SFSPCA director of ranch operations, this is the couple's second offense. They were previously arrested on similar horse abuse charges four years ago, but the charges were dropped after they completed a "pre-trial intervention" program for first-time offenders.

Paez's lawyer, Alexander Michaels, spoke with Miami-Herald reporter David Ovalle, and is quoted as saying the newest charges "were no big deal." And further, "I wish the police would spend more time on human victims, and child victims, than on horses who skipped a meal," Michaels said.

Professional photos of the muscle-bound, hard-bodied couple taken with one of the horses in 2014 are in stark contrast to those of their starving horses. According to Waggoner, the two in the worst condition (scoring a "1" on the Henneke Body Condition Scale, the lowest score possible) would not have lived much longer if not removed from the Paez ranch.

All three had overgrown hooves indicating they hadn't been trimmed in at least a year, possibly a year and a half according to SFSPCA's farrier, Scott Schrofronick. One mare's hooves were so long she could barely walk, tripping and falling as she was being loaded on the SFSPCA's horse trailer.

When questioned about the horses, Paez-Cowan said, they were "a little thin and just needed to be dewormed" and their hooves were "not that bad."

Said Waggoner, "The stalls were filthy and looked like they hadn't been cleaned in a very long time."

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John Garcia, a volunteer assisting Waggoner, observed of the Paez Ranch premises, "There was trash and dangerous debris everywhere, all over the ground, making it almost impossible to find a place to walk without stepping on something. Flammable items were at the facility, along with old boats and trailers, outboard engines, buckets of paint, fiberglass material, cutting objects, garbage... There was absolutely no place to turn out the horses."

"Miami-Dade County is fast becoming ground zero for abused horses," said Kathleen Monahan, SFSPCA president. "That's why we created a Legal Task Force. We have a team of prominent attorneys who assist in the investigation and prosecution of horse cruelty cases. Evidence collected by the task force was instrumental in ensuring that both husband and wife were charged."

SFSPCA is currently caring for over 50 rescued horses at its ranch in Homestead. **To donate, visit: www.helpthehorses.org.**

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The South Florida Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) horse and large livestock rescue organization serving Miami-Dade, FL. SFSPCA operates under the guidelines of Florida State Statutes Chapter 828 which defines animal cruelty, abandonment and neglect. It is not part of or supported by a national or governmental agency, nor associated with the A.S.P.C.A. or any other agency or charity. Operating funds come from the donations of money, services and personal efforts of private individuals and companies. For more information, visit www.helpthehorses.org.