

## Pet lovers grieve over poor funerals

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Kyodo News

Despite surging demand, pet owners are finding it difficult to hold funerals for their dogs and cats.

There are no specific regulations governing this kind of service, and several animal funeral operators have come under fire for charging grieving pet owners extremely high fees and providing shoddy work.

In Hanno, Saitama Prefecture, one such operator has been arrested on suspicion of dumping dead dogs and cats in a mountain forest. The man, a former member of the Hanno Municipal Assembly, is also suspected of delivering to owners the bones of the wrong pet.

"I think that I received the bones of a different dog," said Kazuko Nishigai, 73, a housewife in Miyoshi, Saitama Prefecture, who paid the suspect to cremate four small dogs over the last 15 years.

The first three times, the cremations appeared to have been conducted properly: The urns were hot and there were skulls in them. But when she received the fourth at the end of March, it was cold and there was no skull.

At the dump site in the mountain forest, police found scattered black plastic bags containing animal carcasses. Some bags were hanging from the trees with animal parts protruding from them.

Hearing details of the case, Nishigai grew angry.

"I can't forgive him because I trusted him and entrusted him with my beloved dogs," she said.

The National Consumer Affairs Center says it received 394 complaints and consultation requests about the pet service business in fiscal 2009, up about 100 from fiscal 2003.

"While my pet was being cremated, I was asked to pay five times more money than in the contract," one pet owner said. "When I refused to pay that, I was told, 'The bones will not be returned to you.' "

Another said, "When I said I wanted to see the cremation, the dealer suddenly walked away."

The Environment Ministry, which has jurisdiction over animal protection, says there are laws governing pet dealers, but there are no regulations on cremating pets or providing burial services.

Edogawa Ward, Tokyo, established guidelines for pet incineration facilities in 2006, but its city planning section says the guidelines give consideration to local residents living near such facilities. They make no mention of proper fees or quality of such services.

Alarmed by the surge in disputes over pet funerals, companies in Tokyo with incinerator-equipped vehicles inaugurated the Pet Visiting Cremation Car Association of Japan in 2008.

The association has its own regulations to ensure pet owners get proper service, but it has fewer than 10 members.

Several other companies expressed their readiness to join the association in the wake of the Saitama incident, but the association wouldn't admit them because they refused to comply with its regulations.

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