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## Dogs Euthanized Following Apparent Attack on Owner

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### *KESQ.com News Services*

RANCHO MIRAGE - A 38-year-old Rancho Mirage man who died following an attack from his two "very aggressive" bull mastiffs may have been trying to breed them, a county animal services spokesman said.

The dogs in the "horrible tragedy" were put to death Tuesday morning, according to Animal Services of Riverside County.

The name of the man found Monday afternoon at the rear of a home at 41625 Morningside Court was being withheld, pending family notification.

"Animal Services veterinary team members euthanized two dogs Tuesday morning that were involved in a fatal attack in Rancho Mirage," according to Animal Services spokesman John Welsh.

The dogs, a 3-year-old male named Butter who weighed about 115 pounds and a 2-year-old female named Ebony who weighed 90 pounds, were euthanized around 9 a.m, Welsh said.

At 5:13 p.m. Monday, the victim's neighbors called the Rancho Mirage Police Department, which is staffed by sheriff's deputies, and reported he was bleeding profusely in his backyard, said sheriff's Sgt. Dennis Gutierrez.

Responding deputies found the body and two full-grown bull mastiffs in the backyard, he said. The death, officially designated as "suspicious," was being investigated by sheriff's investigators as a possible dog mauling, but they were awaiting the results of an autopsy, which was scheduled for today.

Animal Control Officer James Huffman said the victim suffered injuries that "were all consistent with a dog attack."

Both of the dogs had blood on them, Huffman said, adding that while the dogs and the man were found in the backyard, sheriff's deputies initially indicated that the attack likely happened inside the home.

Huffman said animal control officers could not immediately enter the backyard because the dogs were so aggressive, particularly Butter.

"The male was obviously protecting the female," he said.

He said both dogs calmed down once they were taken to the county animal shelter.

"This severe of an attack we don't see very often," Huffman said.

The dogs -- belonging to a breed known for being wary of strangers but fiercely protective of their owners -- were seized around 9:30 p.m. Monday by two animal control officers and brought

to the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms.

Welsh said animal control officers were told that the victim may have been trying to breed the dogs. He said the victim's girlfriend gave the authorization to put down the dogs.

"When an attack of this nature occurs, it's certainly a horrible tragedy," Welsh said Monday. "It's really a sad evening and definitely our hearts go out to the gentlemen's family."

Animal Services Capt. Betsy Ritchie said the dogs were not spayed or neutered and did not appear to be licensed.

"When animals are not spayed or neutered, they can be more aggressive," Ritchie said.

A friend of the victim expressed shock, saying the dogs "were pretty timid." The man is survived by a daughter of about 7, according to the friend.

The friend also said he was the first person on the scene and he reported that the man had "severe wounds on his forearms."

The fatal attack is the second in Riverside County in about three months. A mid-December attack by a male and a female pit bull in the Rubidoux area resulted in the death of a 60-year-old man. Those dogs were also euthanized.

Anyone with information on the Rancho Mirage man's death was urged to contact Rancho Mirage police at (760) 836-1600.



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