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Toronto Humane Society officials charged with cruelty, obstructing police

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By The Canadian Press

TORONTO - The president, chief veterinarian and three other staff members of the Toronto Humane Society were arrested and charged with criminal offences Thursday.

Rosaline Ryan of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said they executed warrants at the humane society's offices, aided by police.

Humane society president Tim Trow, general manager Gary McCracken, supervisor Andy Bechtel and manager Romeo Bernadino have been charged with cruelty to animals and obstructing a peace officer, Ryan said.

Head veterinarian Dr. Steve Sheridan is charged with cruelty to animals.

The charges stem from an investigation that was launched in early 2009 in response to allegations of animal cruelty, the OSPCA said.

"This is a difficult day for the Ontario SPCA and the Toronto Humane Society, but it is necessary to protect the lives of animals," said OSPCA Chief Executive Officer Kate MacDonald.

"Our first priority is the safety of the animals," MacDonald said. "Our team of veterinarians will assess their health and take appropriate actions."

OSPCA lawyer Christopher Avery said animals were living under terrible conditions.

"It's absolutely disease infested," Avery said. "The animals are left to catch horrible diseases and die in their crates."

Avery said animals were starving to death and that during an investigation in June an officer lifted a cat and "the skin came off in his hands."

Spokesman Ian McConachie said the Toronto Humane Society's goal is to make the animals in its care better.

"Some will get better, some will pass away, some will be euthanized," McConachie said.

None of the allegations have been proven in court.

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