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Incorrect Breed Identification Costs Dogs Their Lives

February 2012

Is that "pit bull" on your shelter's adoption floor really a pit bull? The results of a recent four-shelter study suggest chances are good that he's not.

Four Florida shelters - Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services, the Jacksonville Humane Society, Marion County Animal Services, and Tallahassee Animal Services - participated in the study. Four staff members at each of the four shelters indicated what breed(s) they thought 30 dogs were, for a total of 16 observers and 120 dogs.

Of those 120 dogs, 55 were identified as "pit bulls" by shelter staff, but only 25 were identified as pit bulls by DNA analysis.

Additionally, the staff missed identifying 20% of the dogs who were pit bulls by DNA analysis, while only 8% of the "true" pit bulls were identified by all staff members.

These poor track records for correctly identifying breed is particularly important, say study authors, because in many municipalities, dogs identified as "pit bulls" are not offered for adoption or are subject to local breed bans preventing their adoption or ownership.

Even in areas without restrictive ordinances or shelter policies, pit bulls are usually stigmatized as undesirable. Labeling a dog a "pit bull" can result in difficulty finding him a home or even his death.

The study report was authored by Kimberly R. Olson, BS and Julie K. Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, of the Maddie's® Shelter Medicine Program, University of Florida and Bo Norby, CMV, MPVM, PhD, of the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences, Michigan State University.

Among the authors' conclusions were:

Because the observers' identifications were so inconsistent, visual identification of breed is unreliable.

The safety of individual dogs is best evaluated by looking at the individual dog's attributes, including personality, behavior, and history, not breed.

The study poster can be viewed [here](#).