

## FBI: Pet cemetery promised cremations, delivered mass burials



AP Laserphoto  
An FBI agent stops at the Long Island Pet Cemetery this week.

MELVILLE, N.Y. (AP) — A pet cemetery accepted millions of dollars from bereaved pet owners to cremate their animals and instead dumped up to 250,000 carcasses in mass graves, the FBI said.

The owners of the Long Island Pet Cemetery and two employees were charged with fraud, the FBI said Tuesday.

Most of the pets were dogs, sent by owners, hospitals and veterinarians.

In addition to the mass burials, pets that were supposed to be cremated individually were instead shoved dozens at a time into large ovens, the FBI said.

Scoops of ashes were then returned to pet owners with certificates falsely stating the ashes were those of their pet, the FBI said.

LIPC owner Alan Strauss, 35, of Dix Hills, and Kathleen Drago, 39, of Coram, and Paul Halverson were arrested. The oth-

er owner, Strauss' father, Samuel, 70, of Boca Raton, Fla., was charged but not immediately arrested.

"This is a real horror story," said James Fox, assistant director of the FBI's New York office.

He estimated pet owners had been defrauded of tens of millions of dollars since 1984.

The cemetery offered private burials, private cremations and mass cremations and mailed brochures urging pet owners to "ease the grief of losing a pet" by choosing private cremation, the "modern and dignified method of care for your pets."

The cost of private cremations ranged from \$100 to \$500, depending on the size of the animal.

The six-month investigation began after a former employee reported the alleged scheme. Two former employees told the

FBI that on the Strausses' orders, "almost no private cremations were performed," investigators said.

"This case is a particularly cruel hoax," said U.S. Attorney Andrew Maloney. "Instead of animal lovers getting peace of mind, they are faced with this."

The animals were not treated with chemicals or enclosed in any type of casket before being dumped, and investigators said they would take water and soil samples to learn whether the carcasses had contaminated ground water.

A foul smell permeates the remote surrounding area, and those walking near the burial pits burials would find themselves sinking into black ooze.

David Pokress of Farmingdale brought his Old English sheepdog, Kodak, to the cemetery in 1990. He said he paid \$250 for a private cremation and the ashes.

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Tue, Apr 2, 2019