

'Puppies R Dead'

SPCA investigate after pups sold by Roxville couple die at record rates

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A Roxville couple already facing charges of animal cruelty are now being investigated by the SPCA for selling dying puppies.

The SPCA seized 10 pups from Gail Benoit and Dana Bailey's property in October and the couple were charged with animal cruelty. Their June 26 court date was adjourned until Oct. 24 and a June 27 date put back to Nov. 5.

This month, the provincial SPCA has received calls from individuals whose puppies have died within days—or within hours—of receiving them from the 'Puppies R Us' van.

Five of six pups sold from the Puppies R Us operation within the past week—miniature dachshunds, Yorkies and Pomeranians—have died. The sixth is alive but under veterinary care.

The families who received the puppies were in Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and New Brunswick.

Esther Smith of Bible Hill says she had been advertising on the website Kijiji that she was looking for a miniature dachshund and wanted to pay no more than \$200. She received a call from Gail Benoit who said she was willing to part with the last of her recent litter for \$500.

Smith says she talked it over with her husband, John Lynds, "and he knew just how much I wanted it."

The next day, a friend asked her to come along on a drive to Windsor. It turned out the friend was taking her to pick up her new pup.

Smith says that Benoit arrived in the McDonalds parking lot in Windsor in a van labeled 'Puppies R Us'. Smith's friend



Esther Smith's miniature dachshund was dead with hours of leaving the hands of its breeder, Gail Benoit. Contributed photo

gave Benoit \$500 cash in exchange for the puppy.

"There was no receipt, no guarantee, but we did receive vet papers that indicated the pup had all her shots," Smith said.

"The puppy was wrapped in a curtain. Gail Benoit told me she had just bathed her and didn't want her to get cold. As we were pulling away I unwrapped her to have a look and I asked my friend to hand me the vet papers we had been given.

"I've had miniature dachshunds before. When I looked at her I couldn't believe she was 10 weeks old. And the vet papers said she had weighed .82 kg the week before, which is over a pound and half. She didn't seem to be that big to me."

When she arrived home, Smith says she became even more concerned because the pup was so lethargic and unsteady on her feet. "Ten week old puppies are usually really playful.

"But I thought maybe she had been given Graval, Some people will do this if they're traveling with a pet. I called my vet and made an appointment for the next morning. I thought if she had been given Graval it would have worn off by then."

The Bible Hill woman offered her new pet food and water, but it refused both. Then Smith settled the puppy into a basket with a stuffed toy and went to a doctor's appointment.

When she came home, the pup was dead.

Esther Smith told her story on CTV News on July 23.

Roger Joyce of Nova Scotia's SPCA says he received one call on the same day he heard from Smith, and received four more calls after the television broadcast. The pups purchased from Puppies R Us by five of the six callers have died. The sixth, under veterinary care, is gravely ill.

Joyce says SPCA agencies in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, along with RCMP, are investigating the sales, and autopsies are being performed in Truro on four of the dead puppies.

Benoit reportedly told CTV News on Friday that she would reimburse families that lost the puppies, but first had to get her money back from a New Brunswick puppy seller who supplied the animals.