



Animalistic Behavior Against Novartis

Posted By: Mike Huckman | Reporter
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I am heartbroken.

A couple of weeks ago I made the extremely difficult decision to put my four-year-old half-black lab/half-comedian dog, Dash, to sleep. Without any kind of warning or build-up, he lunged at a toddler while I was walking him. I restrained him, but in his uncontrollable frenzy he bit me instead. It was the latest in an escalating string of incidents. A behavioral expert subsequently diagnosed him with "genetic, abnormal aggression" and said it was "very risky" to keep him or to try to pass him along to another owner or rescue program. On the one hand, I am hesitant to write about it because I fear it's going to unleash a flurry of hateful emails. But on the other hand, in the context of this blog entry, I just wanted to preface it by saying I'm an animal lover, especially dogs.

As long as it's done as humanely as possible, I have learned in my years covering the pharma/biotech beat about the importance lab animal research plays in the research and development of potential drugs for humans. I'm hesitant to write that as well fearing animal rights activists will send me nasty emails, or worse.

But can it get any worse than this?

Reports surfaced this morning that [animal rights activists are suspected of setting fire to and badly damaging the vacation home](#) of Novartis CEO Daniel Vasella in the wee hours of the morning yesterday.

A company spokesperson says it's a modest place in a small town in Austria. And rather than worry the residents of the hamlet, a company spokesperson says the CEO has decided to sell the property. The arsonists allegedly poured gasoline on both sides of the front door and lit a match.

But the criminals didn't stop there.

Vandals also took the urn containing the ashes of Mr. Vasella's mother from her gravesite and spray-painted "Drop HLS Now" on the headstone. HLS is a lab in the UK where testing is done on animals. But **NVS** says it doesn't contract with that company anymore. Yes, animal testing, in general, is still done, but a good portion of it in recent years has also been replaced by sophisticated computer modeling and other new technologies.

The home, of course, is replaceable. But can you imagine how Mr. Vasella and his family must feel about the grave-robbing? Unbelievable.

I first found out about all this from a tweet (message) on Twitter. But when I followed up with the company, I learned there's much more to this disturbing story.

A spokesperson says there's been an escalating series of attacks beginning last December with employees' cars being destroyed, "amateurish" explosive devices being placed under car tires (they didn't go off), employee homes being vandalized and the company's tennis center at HQ in Europe being set on fire. No one has been hurt or killed.

But then, on July 16th the spokesperson says slogans were painted on the roadway leading up to Mr. Vasella's main residence. Are you ready? According to the spokesperson they said, "Vasella is a killer. We are watching you. Death to Vasella. We'll be back." Other stuff, I'm told, was even more crude.

If my memory serves me correctly, the CEO of Chiron, the vaccine/biotech company that Novartis bought, had similar security issues several years ago. The company, for obvious reasons, won't discuss security measures it's taking. Novartis is working with law enforcement authorities who reportedly have pictures of suspects caught in the act. The company has chosen to keep things publicly on the down low and is only responding to media inquiries in the wake of the arson and grave robbery.

The frightening incidents at Novartis pale in comparison to the grief I'm feeling, but yesterday I got Dash's ashes. They'll be spread this weekend at his "happy place," also known as the nature preserve where he loved to take long walks.

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