

Child Abuse Charges Include Snakes, Lizards And Alligators **News**

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RICHMOND, MO (KCTV) - New child abuse charges are filed against a Ray County couple.



Not only are they accused of killing a 3-week-old baby, but also putting their other children in a very dangerous environment. The new charges involve abuse and neglect of three more children, including a set of charges related to snakes, lizards and alligators.

"We thought it was strange that they had swimming pools in the garage. Come to find out they was keeping alligators," neighbor Lisa Fields said.

Fields' mom used to let the kids come to her place, but she never saw what was inside the baby pools until the kids' parents were arrested.

"Who would keep alligators with their kids? That is kind of strange," Fields said.

More than strange, it could be criminal.

Dennis and Rebecca Matthews have been in jail in Richmond, MO, ever since they were charged with abuse leading to the death of their 3-week-old.

The three other kids, ages two to six, haven't been around them since their arrest in 2012.

They last lived on Southview Drive, but the baby's godparents say they never stayed anywhere for more than a few months before moving, with their reptiles and children, in tow.

Court records accuse the couple of endangerment for "exposing (the children) to boa constrictors, pythons, large lizards and alligators that were not safely caged."

Added to that are three felony counts involving the 3-week-old whose autopsy showed broken ribs from several occasions. They face even more charges for allegedly breaking the arm of their 1-year-old and hitting their 5-year-old on the back until the child bruised.

"It's sad for kids to have to live like that. I feel sorry for kids who have to go through that," Fields said.

The couple is in jail on a \$500,000 bond a piece. The children are in protective custody.