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**Scandal of Athens ... Welfare groups believe city is being
cleared of strays to please TV crews and visitors**

Yet another dog lies poisoned in what the world now sees as Greeks' Olympic tragedy

The summer Olympic Games in Athens is less than four months away - and the city is re-inventing itself, ready for the eyes the world to focus on the huge event. But in part two of our exclusive report **ROGER TAVENER** looks at whether the city's legendary stray dogs are paying the ultimate price as the Greeks clean up their act

THOUSANDS of cats and dogs have died agonising deaths from poisoning on the streets and beach front of Athens in the run-up to the Summer Olympics. And animal welfare groups fear a huge cull of strays before the Games begin in August.

No one can prove who is killing the dumped pets, but everyone suspects why. To keep the venues nice and tidy for the world's TV cameras and millions of foreign tourists in the city. Locals and animal welfare groups say they couldn't fail to notice the dwindling population of the canine community in particular.

Angela Fleming, who has lived in Athens 14 years, says: "Dogs are being left a cocktail of poison in food scattered across the city. It has been happening increasingly since 2001 in the run-up to the Games. It is a disgrace that in the 21st century this can occur. It disgusts me. It is barbaric.

Dead dogs lie everywhere in Athens and surrounding suburbs. Not all have been hit by cars. People have seen garbage men collect bodies at 6 am after poison was left a few hours earlier. Witnesses even claim to have seen live dogs rounded up and thrown into trucks in some Greek towns, never to be seen again.

The state consistently denies it has a secret 'feed to kill' policy and points to new laws designed to help strays. But in the last week of March, more than 80 dogs, many cats and dozens of birds were poisoned in the Attica coastal resort of Saronida, where it is understood some of the British Olympic team will stay. The death rate among strays has increased after a dog bit a Ukrainian archery coach while he was jogging.

Another high-profile slaughter came when Greece took the presidency of the EC and on the eve of the meeting, scores of dogs and cats were poisoned in the adjoining National Park, normally full of strays. "It is a sad, obvious technique," says Ms Fleming. "I have no doubt there is a clean-up campaign, but I have no proof of who is responsible. Nothing would be written down. These animals are hungry, so they will eat the bait. And then they will froth at the mouth and convulse and die a lingering, horrific death. Whoever does this doesn't see the pain."

Ms Fleming, from Caring for the Animals, does because both strays and poisoned pets are taken to her, sometimes beyond help. If she can, she cares for the strays and puts them back on the Street. She gets those that she can neutered, vaccinated and tagged so she can follow their progress.