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Yomiuri

Kobe pet owners sue over eviction order

Yomiuri Shimbun

KOBE—A couple who were ordered to stop keeping two earthquake-displaced dogs at their Kobe apartment filed a ¥33 million damage suit against a real estate agency and two construction firms on Tuesday.

The couple claimed in the suit, filed with the Kobe District Court, that the firms had misled them over rules concerning the ownership of pets when they bought the apartment.

The names of the plaintiffs, who are in their 40s, are being withheld by The Yomiuri Shimbun.

It is believed to be the first time that legal action has been taken against a real estate agency over the issue of keeping pets.

The couple's two children reportedly found the abandoned dogs, then puppies, in a box a few days after the Great Hanshin Earthquake in January 1995, and took them home.

A note attached to the box said the dogs' owners were unable to look after the animals because their home had been damaged in the earthquake.

According to the suit, the municipal apartment where the couple lived at the time had also sustained damage. They bought a new apartment in August 1995, and were told by a real estate agent that, although pets were prohibited, several residents of the building kept them anyway.

The building's administrators, however, took the husband to court to

have the dogs banned from their apartment. The Kobe District Court ordered the couple to stop keeping the dogs, claiming they would disturb other residents.

The real estate agency admitted it may have misled the couple, but has not contacted them since the court announced its decision.

The husband and the dogs are now living in a nearby rented apartment. The wife and the couple's children have remained in the original apartment, which they reportedly hope to sell.

The couple told The Yomiuri Shimbun that they had been unable to refuse their children's request to keep the pets, adding that the dogs had become part of the family over the past four years.

They said they would not have bought the apartment had the real estate agent made it clear that pets were prohibited.

They have demanded ¥10 million in compensation, as well as about ¥23 million to buy a new apartment.

The real estate agency said it would not comment until it had seen the suit.

The Hyogo prefectural government acknowledged that pets can provide comfort to people made homeless by the earthquake, particularly the elderly. The government and the Kobe municipal government have built six apartment buildings with 168 apartments that allow occupants to keep pets.