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In The Wake of Dog Attacks on Postal Workers, Doggone Safe Urges Dog Owners to Learn to Read Their Dogs

Dog owners can help reduce dog bite risk to postal workers by abandoning the assumption that their own dog would never bite, by learning to read the signs of a dog that might bite and by taking action to secure the safety those who might visit their property and encounter the dog.

/24-7PressRelease/ - CAMBELLVILLE, ON, CANADA, June 14, 2008 - Last week brought news of an increasing incidence of dog attacks on Canada Post workers over the past few years and of several recent attacks. These reports were from the west, but dogs pose a risk to letter carriers across the country. Dog owners can help by abandoning the assumption that their own dog would never bite, by learning to read the signs of a dog that might bite and by taking action to secure the safety of postal workers and others who might visit their property and encounter the dog.

The vast majority of dog owners love their dogs, consider them to be part of the family and do not want them to bite anyone. In fact, most dog owners believe that their own dog will not bite. "Oh, he always barks like that, but he would never bite", or "If he bites, I will put him down" are two statements that dog behaviour specialist and Doggone Safe co-founder Teresa Lewin hears from dog owners on a regular basis. "Dog owners need to get their heads out of the sand and learn to read dog body language and understand a bit about dog behaviour so that they can see how very close many of their dogs are to biting", says Lewin. "My dog bit without warning", is a common lament from the dog owner following a bite incident. According to Lewin, there is always a warning. Dog owners and all people encountering dogs need to educate themselves so that they can see the warnings and take appropriate action before the dog is pushed to the point of actually biting.

Doggone Safe suggests a three-pronged approach to help reduce the bite risk for postal workers:

1. Education for children in schools as a mandated part of the curriculum so that future generations grow up with the knowledge they need to read dog body language, treat dogs properly and act safely around dogs.
2. Education for dog owners so that they can read the signs that dogs send when they are anxious, recognize dog behaviour signs that indicate a bite situation is developing and take appropriate actions to protect others and to reduce fear and anxiety in their dog.
3. Education for postal workers so that they can read dog body language, recognize the environmental signs that may indicate a dangerous situation, avoid contact with aggressive dogs and defuse a dangerous situation should they be confronted with a dog.

"Dogs generally do not want to bite. It is a last resort after the dog has exhausted all means of warning", says Christina LeBreton, Doggone Safe Western Co-ordinator and owner of Ciera Canine Services in Edmonton. "I joined with Doggone Safe because they offer the very best information available and I wanted to give back to my community and to help educate my clients and the public about how to understand dogs better and act safely around them. There are far too many dog bites and the vast majority of them are preventable using very simple techniques and some understanding of how to speak dog".

Doggone Safe urges dog owners to take immediate preventative steps if the dog displays any of the following signs in response to the mail carrier or others: barking/lunging at the end of a rope or chain, barking/lunging at the door or from behind a fence, stiff body posture with tail held high or wagging slowly, barking and retreating, backing away, tail between legs (may be wagging), mouth closed and half moon of white showing in the dog's eye, yawning, licking his chops or turning away. Any of these signs indicate a dog that is uncomfortable with the situation and could resort to biting if the situation is allowed to continue. Steps that dog owners can take include, confining the dog out of sight of the letter carrier, never tying a dog outside, never giving the dog access to a screen door or a door that a child could open, providing a bone or other treat to enjoy in a crate or pen at the time the mail is delivered, abandoning the assumption that the dog will not bite, not forcing the dog into situations where it might feel threatened, learning how to train the dog using positive reinforcement so that it can learn to do something else rather than bark at visitors to the house, learning to read dog body language so that they can understand how the dog is feeling and can intervene before the dog bites.

"Never punish your dog for growling, lunging or barking", says Lewin. This may seem counter-intuitive, but if you suppress

the dog's only means of warning, he may go straight to a bite the next time. Yelling, hitting or yanking the dog by the collar in the presence of the letter carrier may stop the dog's overt behaviour for the moment, but it does not make the dog feel better. In fact this will make the dog even more upset and more likely to bite if given the chance when the owner is not there to prevent it. Lewin continues, "the best thing for an owner to do is to change the dog's emotional state. That is, teach the dog to associate positive feelings with the delivery of mail. Happy, confident dogs do not bite. Seek professional help from a trainer who uses positive reinforcement and not punishment to change the dog's attitude and behaviour"

Doggone Safe urges letter carriers to stand still and be a tree if threatened by a dog. This is the best way to prevent a dog bite. Dog behavior experts agree that standing still the moment a loose dog is noticed and remaining still until it goes away is the best advice for anyone encountering a loose dog. Movement triggers the urge to chase and bite in dogs. It is rare for a dog to attack someone that is not moving. If an attack does occur, standing still is the best defense. Trying to fight off a dog will make the bite damage worse and may cause the dog to escalate its attack. Doggone Safe offers safety training to workers who encounter dogs on the job through its "Be Doggone Smart at Work" program.

Doggone safe offers information about reading dog body language, dog training and preventing dog bites as well as an on-line course on basic body language at its website <http://www.doggonesafe.com>.

The Be a Tree program for dog bite prevention education for school age children is also available for communities across Canada with information at www.be-a-tree.com. This program is supported by veterinary technicians/technologist professional associations across Canada and by the Saskatchewan and Ontario Veterinary Medical Associations.

Doggone Safe has experts in dog training, dog behavior and dog bite prevention education available for interview.

About Doggone Safe Inc.:

The not-for-profit Doggone Safe mandate is based on juror's recommendations following an inquest into the mauling death of 8 year old Courtney Trempe in Ontario, Canada. Along with their many educational programs, Doggone Safe also provides victim support and administers the Courtney Trempe Memorial fund, in honor of her memory, to help provide trauma counseling (not provided by insurance) for child dog bite victims and their families.

Visit www.doggonesafe.com for more information and www.be-a-tree.com for information about the Be a Tree program.

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Doggone Safe is a non-profit organization dedicated to dog bite prevention through education and dog bite victim support. Visit us at www.doggonesafe.com.