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Breed bans won't stop dog attacks

Laws should regulate behavior of all dangerous dogs--and owners

By Adam Goldfarb, an expert on dangerous dogs with the Humane Society of the U.S. Published August 21, 2006

There's an adage that says, "When a dog bites a man, it's not news, but when a man bites a dog, it is news." These days, dog bites don't just lead to news, they lead to fights between neighbors, lawsuits and controversial legislation.

Many communities struggle with issues related to dangerous dogs. Some have responded with breed bans, yet time and again such laws have failed to solve dangerous-dog problems.

There are many factors that contribute to a dog's temperament, but breed bans only address one of those factors.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 70 percent of dogs involved in biting incidents are intact (not neutered) males.

Being a responsible pet owner is not difficult, but there are individuals who either don't care about their pets or who intentionally create aggressive animals.

Dogs that live chained up are nearly three times more likely to bite, the CDC says. Dogs that routinely run loose can cause numerous problems in their neighborhoods.

Communities rely on animal control to enforce the laws, but most animal-control offices are already understaffed and underfunded.

Laws that clearly identify dangerous and potentially dangerous dogs are the best tools for animal control and law enforcement officials.

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that are indicative of aggression. These laws can be reactive by punishing the owners of dogs that have menaced people or other animals, or the laws can be preventative by targeting irresponsible and dangerous owner behaviors.

If Chicago truly wants effective laws to prevent dog attacks, a breed ban is not the answer. The city will be better armed with comprehensive dangerous-dog legislation, dog-bite education and enforcement of responsible laws on keeping pets. Legislation aimed at holding dog owners responsible rather than punishing the dogs is the most effective way to reduce the number of dog bites and attacks. Non-breed-specific laws that are enforced offer an effective and fair solution to the problem of dangerous dogs in all communities.

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