

## "Banning dogs is not a solution"

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Pillonel disagrees with bans on certain breeds (Keystone)

**Colette Pillonel, a vet who previously worked for the Federal Veterinary Office, tells swissinfo why she left the government's working group on dangerous dogs.**

On Friday Switzerland's veterinary authority recommended a total ban on keeping Pitbulls, as well as tighter restrictions on 13 other breeds.

The working group was set up after a young child was attacked and killed by Pitbulls in December.

Pillonel said she could not agree with the decision to target certain breeds, as all dogs could be dangerous under certain circumstances.

Pitbulls are not a recognised breed of dog and are bred from other types only for their aggressiveness, according to the veterinary office. Dogs that are crossbreeds from any of the 13 listed – including Pitbulls – will also be banned, under the proposals.

### **swissinfo: You recently left the government's official working group on dangerous dogs. Why did you do that?**

Colette Pillonel: The measures were imposed on us. At the end of the meeting, which included the cantonal veterinary services, we were told that everybody had to agree that we needed to ban Pitbulls. It wasn't a consultation.

I said that if that was the summary of the discussion, I couldn't agree with it and that if they went ahead with that, I would officially leave the group.

I can understand certain measures that they want to take but I cannot support them for various reasons. The first is responsibility: if you make a list of dangerous breeds, you're saying that other breeds not on the list are not dangerous. Giving that signal to the public is a very big problem for me because every dog is dangerous. Every study on this topic says the same thing: every dog is dangerous. It's lying to the public, saying that you have to be afraid of these breeds.

Secondly, experiments in other countries including Britain and Germany that have tried to apply legislation with breed-specific measures have not come up with any results. So it's a lot of time, money, work and no results.

The third reason is that this legislation is not applicable because it is very difficult to say that this dog is from that breed. For example, Rottweilers are on the list but we have a lot of dogs that look like Rottweilers, such as the Beauceron [the French Shorthaired Shepherd]...

DNA testing could be the only way of proving a dog's breed, but I don't think they're considering this.

I also told the director of the Federal Veterinary Office that he would never have the courage to put on the list the dogs which are responsible for the most bites in Switzerland: German Shepherds and Belgian Shepherds. They are currently not on the list.

**swissinfo: To what extent is all this just a political knee-jerk reaction?**

C.P.: For me, anything concerning a list of breeds is 150 per cent a political appeal to the masses, it is just a response to pressure from [the mass-circulation newspaper] Blick.

The problem is that because of these breeds that are banned or will need a licence, we will have no more resources to work with measures that work – and that's a big problem. At the meeting we fought for two hours about breeds! Not once did we discuss the real measures.

**swissinfo: What measures do you mean?**

C.P.: There are measures which we know are efficient because certain cantons, such as Neuchâtel, concentrate on the dogs that have been reported. If you see an incident or something wrong with a dog, you can call and there is an investigation into that dog.

Also in Neuchâtel they have a lot of prevention work with children and dog owners. These two methods of working have resulted in a 30 per cent drop in accidents.

Banning dogs is not a solution. We know it doesn't work and it's difficult to apply.

swissinfo-interview: Thomas Stephens

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Federal Veterinary Office: <http://www.bvet.admin.ch/index.html?lang=en>

Swiss Canine Association (German, French): <http://www.hundeweb.org/>