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**Dog attack outside city unlikely to be resolved**

County doesn't have ordinance that controls dangerous dogs.

By Ruppy Singh  
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Last Sunday, 9-year-old Abby Shifflet was walking home when her mother says a neighbor's dog attacked her.

She went to the hospital and received six staples in her head, three stitches behind her left ear and one on it. Her ear also had to be glued.

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According to the Sheriff's Department investigative report, much remains in debate about the incident, including where it occurred, which of two dogs was involved, whether either dog had its rabies vaccination, even — according to the dogs' owner — whether one of his dogs caused the girl's injuries.

And those issues are unlikely to be formally resolved, because the West Maplewood Street neighborhood is located just outside the city limits.

In Springfield, dog attacks have been a subject of debate and council action in recent years. But there is not the same dangerous dog ordinance in Greene County.

"I had no opinion on the whole dog issue. But trust me, I am no longer neutral," said Dana Shifflet, Abby's mother.

In the end, one of the neighbor's dogs, a Great Dane, was quarantined at a vet clinic by the health department. He will stay there for 10 days to make sure he does not have rabies.

After 10 days have passed, the dog will be returned to the owner, said Ron Boyer, assistant director of Springfield/Greene County Health Department.

"The owner gets the dog back and pays the vet bill. Tickets are not issued," he said.

Since there is no ordinance or animal control in the county, stray and dangerous dogs are a big problem, said Boyer.

"We get a large number of calls from Greene County people that say their neighbor's dog is vicious or a dog is prowling on the school yard or what not, but there is nothing we can do about it," Boyer said.

Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch admitted there are very few restrictions in place in the county when it comes to dangerous dogs.

"If a person is bit by a dog, the owner is contacted and if the animal does not have rabies shots then the animal is quarantined. Other than that there is



Abby Shifflet, 9, is shown with her mother, Dana. Sunday, the girl was bitten by a dog that allegedly belongs to a neighbor.

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A dog-bite wound on Abby Shifflet's head requires six staples.

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nothing really that county can do," he said.

But that may change. Bengsch said the county is looking at adopting an animal control ordinance that would apply to the Urban Service Area around Springfield, and a proposal is being drafted.

"I think all three of the commissioners will like to see something brought to us for action this summer or early fall," he said.

The county does currently have a provision of declaring a dog dangerous under its planning and zoning code, but it is very cumbersome, said Bengsch.

"In the past two years, since I have been in office, it has never been done. I don't know about before that," Bengsch said.

Under state law, the county prosecutor can pursue state charges in bite cases where there is criminal neglect, but that rarely happens, Boyer said.

"These attacks happen in the county on a regular basis, we get reports of dogs chasing people, attacking other animals, pretty much weekly," he said.

Gibson said his department had completed its investigation of the incident involving Abby and sent the report to the health department. It is up to them to take it up with the owner of the dog, who could not be reached for comment for this story.

The Health Department has no plans to do that for two reasons, Boyer said.

"Number 1, our contract only covers investigating and quarantining the animal. Number 2, the county does not have any ordinance (regarding that)," Boyer said.

The county pays \$12,000 a year to the Health Department for investigating dog bites and making sure that the animal is quarantined, Boyer said.

In contrast to Greene County, in Springfield, after a dog attack or a complaint, the director of the Health Department can hold hearings to determine whether a dog is dangerous or vicious, Bengsch said.

"If a dog is declared dangerous, some restrictions can be put in place, and if a dog is declared vicious, then it moves over to the Municipal Court to determine if it will be euthanized or not," he said.

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