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ELECTRIC NEWS

Bitten by dog at pet shop

But shop owner doesn't have to pay her compensation

By Tan Mae Lynn

March 25, 2006

IF a dog bites you in the street, its owner may be fined up to \$5,000.

But if the same dog bites you inside a house or shop, the owner may not be guilty of any offence.

This is what Ms Peggy Zee found out after she was bitten by a dog in a Lavender Street pet shop last July.

Ms Zee, 46, director of a childcare centre, had seven puncture wounds on her hand, needed surgery and had to be hospitalised for a day.

The bill came to almost \$6,000 - not including follow-up visits to the doctor.

But when she reported the case to the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) and the police, she was told that she could file a civil suit, because there was nothing much the authorities could do.

This is because the attack happened on private premises, and not in a public place.

It is believed to be the first reported case of an animal attack inside a pet shop here.

The police did give the shop, Perfect Pets Paradise, a verbal warning.

But the shop refused to pay compensation to Ms Zee. It claimed the dog which bit her belonged to a customer.

It is a pet supplies shop and does not sell animals, though the owner does keep dogs.

Ms Zee spoke to The New Paper after she read a recent report on a pedestrian taking a dog

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owner to court.

She said she and a friend had gone to the pet shop on 30 Jul to buy a collar for her miniature schnauzer, Popsicle.

She saw two wolf-like alaskan malamutes walking around inside.

She said she asked someone in the shop about the two dogs and was told it was safe to enter with her dog.

Still, Ms Zee carried Popsicle as a precaution.

Then one of the malamutes pounced on her. 'It happened so fast I didn't even know what happened. The dog was so big, the impact threw me back and I fell,' she said.

She realised she was hurt only after they had run outside.

'It was so painful I thought my arm was broken,' she said.

Ms Zee's friend rushed her to Mount Alvernia Hospital and she was admitted there. The next morning, the wounds were cleaned under general anaesthesia before she was discharged.

Her friend, Ms Fiona Foo, 36, who is also a director at the childcare centre, later called the pet shop to let them know what happened after they left the shop, and to ask for medical compensation.

She said: 'They refused to compensate, though they had said 'okay, okay' immediately after the incident.'

When The New Paper visited Perfect Pets Paradise about a week ago, there was a sign (below) outside the shop asking customers to notify staff if they are entering with their own pets.

The notice also said: 'Enter at your own risk'.

An additional barrier just inside the door also had a warning: 'Beware of dog.'

There were four dogs in the shop - medium to large-sized siberian huskies and alaskan malamutes.

Shop owner Francis Yeo said the sign had been there all along, but the barrier was a recent addition.

While speaking to Mr Yeo, one of the larger dogs barked at a young customer, about 10 years old.

Mr Yeo's response: 'Dogs will surely make noise. But they're not... being aggressive.'

Mr Yeo was not in the shop at the time of the incident, but was informed of it by a staff member. He said the dog that bit Ms Zee was not his because his dogs were not aggressive and had not bitten anyone.

He said: 'At the time, there was only one malamute in the shop and it is female.'

'There were other customers and their dogs around... it could have been another customer's dog that bit her.'

Ms Zee said there were two of the dogs in the shop and the larger of the two, possibly a

male, had bitten her.

She felt the shop should bear some responsibility for her injury and consulted her lawyer.

She was told that her legal fees could come to over \$10,000 and the compensation she would get, if any, may not even cover half the hospital bill. (See report right.)

She said: 'It did not make financial sense... I would have to fork out so much more for only the possibility of getting back \$2,000 at best (the compensation to be paid to the injured person).'

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