

The Northern Advocate

Dog bite prompts warning

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By SASKIA KONYNENBURG

A DOG attack on a Whangarei probation officer has left her Corrections Department colleagues fearful of visiting some offenders' properties.

The officer received a nasty bite after a mastiff cross, on a Kamo property, rushed at her and latched on to her leg.

She was treated by medics and reported the incident to animal control officers at Environmental Northland.

Environmental Northland manager Keith Thompson said the woman had received a nasty bite, which would have been very painful. The dog had been put down and the owners fined \$400.

Mr Thompson said the incident highlighted the need for people visiting strange properties to be aware of dogs.

"You never know what's lurking in someone's garden. Electricity guys and phone guys often call us concerned about dogs."

He said he recently attended a similar incident when a chained-up dog bit a tradesman as he walked up a garden path.

"It's important that homeowners keep a clear path to their door for visitors. If their dog is dangerous then it should be chained up, or there should be lots of warning signs," Mr Thompson said.

One probation officer, who didn't want to be named, said the latest attack had highlighted an added danger to their already perilous job.

"It is another thing we have to worry about. Many properties we visit are rural and the type of people we deal with can make this a dangerous job. We go on our own to these properties and this incident has made us all very concerned."

She said her colleague was recovering from the attack but still shaken.

Medics told her the bite was the worst they had seen.

Probation services Te Tai Tokerau area manager Darius Fagan confirmed that a probation officer was bitten by a dog while departing from a home visit at an offender's property.

"There are procedures in place for avoiding injuries caused by dogs," Mr Fagan said.

"The offender was asked at induction if he owned a dog and it was recorded on his file that there was no dog at that address.

"As per the process, the probation officer re-checked that information prior to visiting the offender's home.

"While dog attacks are a serious matter they occur rarely and the department is confident that the procedures in this instance were followed correctly."

* HAVE SAY ON DANGEROUS DOGS

The Government wants to hear your ideas on what should be done about dangerous dogs.

Local Government Minister Nanaia Mahuta said she was going to revisit dog control laws in the New Year, and had put out an options paper with ideas from dog owners, local authorities and other agencies.

None of the ideas was official policy yet, she said.

The document - called Improving Public Safety Under the Dog Control Act 1996 - is available from the Internal Affairs website, www.dia.govt.nz/dogcontrol, or from district council offices. Submissions close March 31, 2008.

[Back to top](#)



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