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Sunday in Parade



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Mixed-breed dogs involved in most 'bite' cases here

By [Tom Cherveney](#), West Central Tribune

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WILLMAR — In each of the last two years, Willmar police officers investigated 15 incidents involving people bitten by dogs in which the wound was severe enough to puncture the skin.

A review of records for the last three years fails to show a breed of dog that stands out as the major problem however, said Police Chief Jim Kulset.

The chief reviewed the last three years of records on dog bite cases and found that most of the bites had been inflicted by mixed-breed dogs. That's probably because the largest number of dogs in the city are mixed breeds, he noted.

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After mixed breeds, the breed of dog involved in the most bite cases was Labrador retrievers. Pit bull and Rottweiler breeds were also involved in some of the bite cases, he said.

Each year, about one-half dozen of the dog bite cases are referred to the city attorney's office to have the dogs certified as dangerous. In those cases, the owners usually elect to euthanize the dogs rather than take on the costs associated with keeping a dangerous animal, he said.

The chief said that from his experience, most of the animal complaint cases in the city have more to do with how the animals are trained and treated by their owners than with the breed of the

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dog. "Ownership is everything," he said.

The chief said it would be difficult for officers to enforce a law banning certain breeds of dogs. What about mixed dogs with parentage from one of the banned breeds?

The chief's observations on the issue in Willmar match what Dr. Petra Mertens, an animal behavior veterinarian formerly with the University of Minnesota, sees in her Twin Cities clinic.

Mertens said that certain dog breeds do have a higher propensity to act in an aggressive manner. They were bred to be that way, no different than retrievers were bred to retrieve or pointers to hunt, she noted.

But Mertens said that a dog's overall behavior reflects the training and handling it receives as well. Owners with breeds of dogs known to be aggressive can effectively manage them. And, they can anticipate situations where the dog could be pushed to a threshold that triggers its instinctive behavior.


She pointed out that localities in Germany once banned certain so-called "dangerous" dog breeds but discovered that the number of dog bite cases did not vary.

Mertens said high-profile dog bite cases involving these breeds often attract media attention and calls for legislation. In Europe, a more effective approach has been to require the owners of breeds considered dangerous to undertake training in their care and management.

While Willmar sees its share of dog bite cases, Kulset said far more police time is devoted to responding to complaints about barking dogs or dogs running at large. Last year the police received more than 1,000 animal complaints.

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West Central Tribune
 2208 Trott Ave. SW / P.O. Box 839
 Willmar, MN 56201