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Dog linked to attack injured, euthanized

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A female boxer - one of two dogs police say attacked two people earlier this week - was euthanized Tuesday because of internal injuries she may have suffered as a result of the attack, officials said.

It wasn't immediately clear how the dog, Zoe, was injured during Monday's incident along Calle San Rafael, which also involved a male boxer named Soco.

"She appeared to be fine that night, but the following morning it was obvious she was injured," Palm Springs Animal Control Supervisor Esther Petersen said Thursday, adding that the dog was favoring one of her legs.

The dogs were in their owner's backyard and somehow got through a gate Monday night and attacked a man on Paseo Caroleta.

Soon after, they attacked a woman across the street from their home on Calle San Rafael.

Neither victim suffered life-threatening injuries, officials said.

A Palm Springs firefighter who responded to the incident used an ax to kill Soco when the dog charged him, according to the Palm Springs Police Department.

But there was no information Zoe had been hit as well. Officials are uncertain how the dog was injured.

Zoe was taken into custody shortly after the attack and the next morning her injuries became apparent, officials said.

Figures from 2007 weren't immediately available, but there were 2,223 reports of dog bites in Riverside County in 2006, according to the Department of Animal Services.

That's up from 1,773 in 2005.

Dogs' aggressive traits may likely be traced back over a lengthy period of time due to reinforced behavior, an expert said.

"Friendly, happy dogs don't just (suddenly) bite," Riverside County Department of Animal Services Senior Behaviorist Teryn Hartnett said.

For example, a dog may bark at a mailman who comes and goes. Overtime, the pet will think it's doing its job of chasing off strangers, Hartnett said.

"The one time the fence is gone, they're still trying that same behavior of 'get out of my yard,'" Hartnett said. "If you're moving, it stimulates the dog even more."

Boxers are typically peaceful and it's unclear why the dogs attacked, Petersen said.

"Unfortunately, the two dogs can't tell us," she said.

The dogs belonged to Palm Springs resident Brian Mullins, an American Medical Response worker, who also is unsure about the circumstances behind the incident.

His family owned Soco for about five months and had Zoe for more than a year. They had been well-behaved the entire time, he said Thursday.

Mullins is cooperating with investigators and the incident is still being reviewed by the District Attorney's Office. No charges have been filed.

Mullins said Thursday he wants the victims to know he is very apologetic.

In the meantime, his family is coping with the loss of two loved ones.

"The kids are upset - they were family pets," Mullins said.
