

Owners warned to curb dogs after bite cuts postie's artery

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With bite marks still visible on the leg of veteran letter carrier Heather Preuss, Canada Post issued a plea to Calgarians on Wednesday to help them curtail an age-old problem.

Please, watch your dogs.

Preuss was attacked by a chow-cross in a northeast neighbourhood last week, with the animal opening an artery that caused extreme bleeding and bruising.

At the time, the dog's owner was working in her yard with part of the fence down. The dog was unrestrained. When the animal heard Preuss delivering mail at the house next door, it charged the carrier.

Despite the owner's command "No," the dog bit Preuss.

"I'm very cautious . . . I knew where every dog was on my route," Preuss said at a news conference about dog attacks on mail delivery employees.

"This one was a troubled dog," Preuss said. "He was very aggressive behind the fence; he'd broken out a few times."

It was the first time Preuss had been bitten, but it was the 11th case of a dog attack on a Canada Post employee in the city this year.

In 2007, there were more than 500 dog-related incidents involving Canada Post mail carriers across the country.

In Calgary, there were 27 reported cases of dog bites last year.

The numbers concern Canada Post.

"We're seeing an urbanization in society where we have more delivery to the doors," said Adrean Wolvers, a health and safety officer with Canada Post. "Also, the other thing that is happening is we are getting more (dog attacks) that are reported."

However, Wolvers added that many attacks still go unreported.

Barbara Walmer, a certified dog trainer and co-ordinator of the Calgary Humane Society's



CREDIT: Leah Hannel, Calgary Herald
Canada Post letter carrier Amanda Wiebe faces dogs daily on her route in Dover. Canada Post is asking Calgarians to help prevent dog bite incidents.

behaviour program, said all dogs have the capability of attacking.

"When they are feeling threatened or that they have to defend their territory . . . when someone starts to pass that boundary, they may have to act upon it," Walmer said.

Even if they are locked up, dogs can be practising aggressive behaviours behind barriers like fences or locked doors when the mail carrier visits, said Walmer.

"If a door is accidentally left open, in previous days, they've practised already aggressing towards that person," she said. "They can follow through with it and cause a bite."

Wolvers said some dog bites stem from mail carriers invading the "dog's territory."

He also said the Canada Post employee uniforms can act as a trigger for some dogs.

"Just by the nature of doing our jobs, we put ourselves at risk," said Wolvers. "The potential risk is huge. Some people wind up with permanent injuries from them.

"The risk for our employees is at an unacceptable level."

In Preuss's case, the pet owner took her to the hospital for stitches. He also had the dog euthanized.

"At that point, I wanted to get out (of letter delivery)," said Preuss, "but I realize that's part of the job. That was an anomaly. That doesn't happen every day on my route."

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