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Police change approach after dog attack

BY JAMES GELUSO, Californian staff writer
jgeluso@bakersfield.com | Monday, Sep 8 2008 4:20 PM

Last Updated: Monday, Sep 8 2008 4:20 PM

Drue Venters wanted his neighbor's dog gone, and he was prepared to kill it himself if need be. And he told police that.

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After the neighbor's dog — which didn't have a history of violence — charged Venters' wife, knocking her over multiple times to get the Pomeranian she held in her arms, Venters didn't want the animal in the neighborhood anymore.

Venters' wife was bruised, and the Pomeranian was killed.

But until Venters told police he'd kill the dog, and called a television news crew, police were prepared to let the dog's owners stay. In the end, a sergeant convinced the owners to give the dog up.

"I don't feel the owner should have had the choice," Venters said as he told his story to a Bakersfield City Council committee Monday. The incident has led to a change in the way Bakersfield police view dog attacks, said Lt. Gary Moore.

Under Bakersfield's code, which follows state law, dogs are considered dangerous after two attacks on another animal, or one attack on a human, said Tammy Davis, who heads up the city's animal control unit.

But the law also leaves considerable room for an officer to exercise judgment, she said.

Moore said from now on, officers will be more likely to consider an attack where a dog goes through a human to get to another dog as an attack on the human.

All the factors have to be weighed, Davis said, including the severity and length of the attack, and whether the dog broke free from its confinement. And the law only applies to unprovoked attacks.

But the police can't make a snap judgment, Moore said.

"It's the Constitutional rights of the dog?" asked Councilman David Couch, joking.

"Actually, it's the Constitutional rights of the owner of the dog," replied City Attorney Ginny Gennaro.

Councilwoman Sue Benham, who chairs the committee, said she thinks the discretion already in the law is sufficient, even if the process didn't work that well in Venters' case.

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