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Dog that can open lanai has bitten three people

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A 70-pound Lab mix that knows how to pop open a lanai door has bitten three people in the past year, including a probation officer and a worker gathering information for the U.S. Census Bureau.

Dakota lives in the 2100 block of Temple Street near Bahia Vista Street in Sarasota; signs posted in the front yard warn "Bad dog" and "Beware of dog."

The three people bitten were attacked as they approached the home's front lanai.

Lt. Tom Stroud of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Animal Services Section said the agency is seeking to have the dog declared a vicious animal.

If the dog is declared vicious, Lt. Stroud said, the owners would be required to keep it contained, and that would include an improved lock on the door, one Dakota cannot open.

Once declared vicious, the owners would also have to pay \$100 annually and post warning signs.

Calls to the dog's owner were not returned.

The most recent attack occurred April 15, as David Fraser, 52, approached the front of the home while gathering data for the U.S. Census.

Fraser's job for the Census Bureau involves a computer and GPS system, and requires him to go to homes, line up a GPS and pop a button that registers that house.

Fraser said he was about 5 feet from the door of the house's lanai when he heard a "low growling." Then, he says, in a flash the dog "lurches and succeeded to open the front door" and grab and bite his wrist.

The dog took off and Fraser saw he was bleeding; he ended up at Sarasota Memorial Hospital for a tetanus shot and antibiotics.

Fraser said that under normal circumstances, in light of the dog-warning signs, he might have stayed farther back from the lanai door. But that day, his supervisors had given Census workers "a quality control talk." Workers were "failing quality controls" and were told they needed to get to within 5 feet of structures before registering them.

Officials with the U.S. Census have declined to comment.

According to county records, the first person bitten was a probation officer who went to the door of the home in May of 2008. She was bitten on the left arm and left leg. The dog had its rabies shot, so was quarantined at home.

An animal officer who investigated that incident wrote in a report that when the house was approached, the dog "opened the lock." The dog "dislodged the latch and came after me, forcing me to defend myself with my ASP" — a collapsible baton.

The same investigator went to the house again in August of 2008 when Dakota bit a woman on the finger after she approached the house, records show.

The sheriff's report on the incident said the investigator told the owner "a more secure latch was needed on the lanai door, since back in May when I was at the residence 'Dakota' managed to pop the latch open and came after me."

As Animal Services makes a case to have Dakota declared vicious, Stroud said that it is "hard to proceed" in cases in which the dog attacks people on its owner's property. Cases in which a dog is roaming free are easier to make.

Stroud also said there are problems with the county ordinances on animals, and officials are trying to come up with an improved set of rules.
