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THE TRI-CITY NEWS

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SFU student dogs breed-specific regs

By Sam Cooper The
Tri-City News
Aug 04 2006

Picking on pit bulls won't make society any safer, an SFU study says.

SFU criminology graduate student Niki Huitson studied breed-specific legislation for her master's thesis and concluded it doesn't curb attacks.

Breed-specific legislation restricts or bans ownership of certain dogs. In Ontario ownership of pit bulls is banned outright.

About half of Lower Mainland municipalities have breed-specific laws. In Coquitlam, pit bulls are defined vicious, requiring owners to muzzle them in public, while Port Coquitlam and Port Moody have no breed-specific laws.

Huitson says pit bulls have been demonized, leading to breed-specific laws that only give a false sense of security.

"Evidence in cities with tough [breed-specific] licensing laws, like Calgary, shows it is not reducing dog bites," Huitson said. "Dog bites are consistent regardless."

Former Vancouver mayor Larry Campbell was external examiner for Huitson's study and endorsed her conclusions.

Huitson interviewed representatives from the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Vancouver SPCA, the RCMP, as well as dog breeders. She says many felt there should be dog attack laws but most agreed designating certain breeds as dangerous would not solve the problem.

Huitson said there is no scientific proof that certain breeds are more vicious but the pit bull's historic image as a fighter makes it a target of irresponsible owners.

"There is one or two per cent of the population that buys the dog to be aggressive," Huitson said. "Clearly it is the owner that makes a dog vicious and we need to be tougher on them."



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