



## Dogs aren't born mean, it's people that make them that way

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There are probably a lot of ways to make a mean dog, but one sadly tried-and-true method is to tie it up out in the yard and forget about it.

No doubt, there are responsible owners who see nothing wrong with tethering a dog outside for a few hours of fresh air and exercise, whose pets are probably none the worse for it.

But we've all seen the others: the scary pit bull that erupts in a barking frenzy, lunging and straining at the end of the chain when it sees you coming down the sidewalk. Or the sad-eyed mutt tied up next to a doghouse, its existence limited to the worn-down patch of dirt defined by the rope's radius.

These aren't pets. They're prisoners.

Before you think that I've gone all PETA on you and that I'll shortly be saying lobsters experience complex emotions and chickens require indoor carpeting, consider that this isn't just a dog problem. It's a public-safety problem, and a social problem. It's a *people* problem.

Last week, Dallas' Animal Shelter Commission proposed a package of recommendations that I fervently hope this city (and all others) will seriously consider.

They advise limiting the number of animals one household may keep; they impose a nearly universal requirement for pets to be spayed or neutered; and they ban tethering or chaining unsupervised dogs to trees or posts.

Like many cities, Fort Worth has already acted: This week, the City Council banned tethering any unattended dog. A city health department news release sent out after the action states the obvious: "There is evidence that tethering dogs makes them more dangerous. ... Our animal control officers encounter on a daily basis tethered dogs that are left without food, water, or shelter."

Ordinances like this one, or the measures proposed in Dallas, are about a thousand times more practical and humane than the knee-jerk wave of ban-the-breed legislation that sweeps through after every publicized dog attack.

The reason: As veterinarians and health officials – experts – patiently keep saying, dog problems are caused by *people*. It's human behavior that got us to the point where entire neighborhoods in ostensibly civilized American cities look like Third World shantytowns: sick, skinny, half-feral animals roaming the streets; crazed, chained-up dogs prized for their meanness by half-witted gangsters or homeowners who use them as cheap burglar alarms.

Outlaw a "mean" breed, and these imbeciles will go to work on a "friendly" one.

A veteran animal control officer in Louisiana's Calcasieu Parish recently told a television station there:

"I've seen the chow go through that phase. And the Rottweiler and the Doberman. ... The pit bull has just hung on a lot longer than any of those dogs."

Pet owners (you can save that "companion animal" business – until our cats start paying for groceries, we're the owners) have obligations, not only to their animals, but to their neighbors and their communities.

Consider that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that a dog routinely tethered or chained up is nearly three times more likely to bite than a dog that's fenced or kept indoors.

Or that, according to a Pennsylvania-based anti-tethering advocacy group, 194 children nationwide have been killed or maimed by chained dogs in the last five years. You may not lose much sleep over dogs, but surely you care about kids, don't you?

Domestic dogs don't "choose" to be chained up, or run loose, or breed indiscriminately, any more than a family pet who peed on the floor one time too many "chooses" to be unceremoniously dumped by the highway.

Humans, disgracefully, *do* choose to mistreat them, neglect them, let them roam loose, chain them up, or egg them into aggressiveness.

Banning breeds, euthanizing ever-increasing numbers of strays and letting people do whatever they please with their own "property" are not just inhumane solutions – in practical terms, they aren't solutions at all.

Dallas' "dog problem" is in reality a "people problem." And it's past time to hold those people accountable.