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These emails have bite

[LINWOOD BARCLAY](#)

The Ontario government has vowed to get tough with pit bulls who use the Internet to lure victims into their yards so that they may bite them.

"With all the new laws coming down to ban any new pit bulls and muzzle those currently in existence," says the province's attorney-general, "the breed is becoming increasingly crafty in its methods. It is adapting. We never expected something like this to happen."

Under the law the province passed Tuesday, a pit bull taken out in public must be leashed and muzzled, which makes it pretty difficult for one to take a bite out of somebody. The pit bull's only hope now is to get potential victims onto its property, where it can roam about muzzle-free.

"That's where the Internet comes in," says the attorney-general, who is seeking to give the existing law more teeth.

Perhaps you're one of the thousands who have already received an email that looks something like the following:

"HI! HUmAn PPPerson: WoULDD U likke tO KOme + patt a VVery KUtE DogiE?

i AM a vEEry Veeri CuTTE doGi!! yES YES i M!! WhY doonT u coMEE to my yARdd anD u KAN cee 4 UrsELF?!! Ha HA hA!!!! HA!"

Just last week, an Etobicoke woman received such an email and, because she has always loved dogs, she found the invitation irresistible. But just as she was about to enter the yard in question, she heard snarling beyond the gate and changed her mind.

"I'll never do anything like that again," she told authorities. "I don't know what I was thinking."

What the attorney-general wants to do now is amend the law, adding a provision making it illegal for pit bulls to have access to computers. The amendment would also include such devices as Blackberries.

"We're still debating whether they could use a computer to play games, do household finances, that sort of thing, just so long as it was not connected to the Internet," said one provincial official.

"But the bottom line would be, they wouldn't be able to send out emails."

Pit bull lovers are outraged by the ban, complaining that it is blatantly unfair. "You ban the activity, not the breed," they say.

They argue that any type of dog that misuses a computer should be forbidden from going online. As an example, they point to the recent case of a Shih Tzu that sent out millions of emails advising recipients that they had won a European "Milk-Bone Lottery." Supposedly, all anyone had to do to receive thousands of free doggie biscuits was provide his or her bank account information, so that a small delivery fee could be deducted.

"But you don't see them banning all Shih Tzus, do you?" pit bull lovers say.

Until the province has successfully stopped pit bulls from accessing computers, what can you do to protect yourself? The answer, as is so often the case in matters such as these, is to be aware. Here are some tips:

★ If a dog is by its very nature unbearably adorable or even merely cute, chances are it does not need to use the Internet to find people to pat it. The dog will probably be getting as much attention as it can handle already.

★ Email from pit bulls, as is evident from the example above, are filled with typographical errors. This is not just because they are notoriously poor spellers. It's also due to the fact that their paws, unlike fingers, are not very good at operating keyboards. "Some try to use their nose," said the attorney-general, "but they still make as big a mess of it."

★ Don't open any attached files sent by pit bulls or any other breed. They may have fleas.

Linwood Barclay's column runs Monday, Friday and Saturday. Email: lbarclay@thestar.ca.

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