

Dog Attacks!  
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What I know about dog behavior, dog attacks and dog training can fill several pages. The two most important things I can impart to you are #1) **ALL DOGS BITE** and #2) **YOU CAN'T GET BITTEN IF YOU ARE NOT WHERE THE DOGS ARE!**

Before I elaborate on these two axioms, let me get your attention. There are currently 74.8 million dogs in the USA. (APPMA 2007-2008 NATIONAL PET OWNERS SURVERY) I suspect this is a light estimate. My reasoning is that in my office we have a map of the city with a stick pin in place for every registered dog. In the rougher area of town, the map is distinctly absent of pins but abundant in pit bulls! If you haven't made the connection, not many drug dealers register their dogs.

There are 4.7 million dog bites in the USA annually, 1,000 Americans treated in the ER daily from dog attacks!! **In 2007, there were 33 fatal attacks in the US.**

(Dogbitelaw.com) Each year, 2,851 Letter Carriers are attacked by dogs. Most dog bite victims are children and half of those children are bitten in the face.

Before we can talk about dog behavior, we need to talk about human behavior or more correctly, human misbehavior. It all starts with some misconceptions about the role dogs play in our lives. How many people do you know or know of, acquired a certain breed of dog in order to "protect the family". 77% of dog bites are from the family pet. You can't go a day without picking up a paper and reading about a dog attack against a child from a family pet.

The three dog breeds involved in 74% of serious attacks are the Pit Bull, Rottweiler's and Presa Canarios. Some men and women seem to need these breeds to fulfill an image of themselves as tough and dangerous. The animal shelters are full of these dogs because the need of the owner to fulfill their personal image did not meet their ability to control these powerful breeds. Have you ever seen a 110 lb. person walking a 120 lb. dog on a retractable leash? Did it inspire confidence?

Have you ever heard the statement "it's not the dog, it's the way it was raised"? In part, that is true. Everybody loves a well trained, calm submissive dog but very few people have the time, patience or skill it takes to train a dog properly. Most are not willing to spend the money on professional trainers or are they willing to at least buy a book on training. These people are the ones who usually wind up in the ER and their dog winds up in the pound.

Now I would like emphasize that I love animals and have trained several dogs over the years. I mention this because my next statement is going to tick dog lovers off. **Dogs are not smart.** I know you are saying to yourself that your dog is very smart. More than likely, your dog is very trainable. Dogs are smarter than many other animal breeds but they are not smart. Can they read? Write? Speak in full sentences?

Pit Bulls and similar breeds have been bred for certain characteristics that make them less than desirable as family pets. They have gotten bigger, stronger and more vicious through selective breeding. The Animal Control Officer in my city started out with a

noose and dog spray several years ago. This past year he found it necessary to acquire a pistol permit and TASER training.

Why do dogs bite? The simple answer is because it is the natural thing to do. Dogs bite because they see it in their best interest to do so. One of the main reasons Letter Carrier's get bitten, is that we have **entered the dogs claimed territory**. They can't very well stop you and say "do you mind not coming in my yard, it's mine?" So the dog puts on the show, barking, growling, head down, teeth bared, and pacing back and forth. This leads to the second reason for biting, **excitement**. A wagging tail does not mean happy, it means excited. **Dominance** is another reason dogs act aggressively. Some dogs just want to be the leader. Dogs will bite in **self defense** or defense of their pack (family) when they are surprised or perceive a challenge. Some dogs are **trained to be aggressive**. Junk yard dogs come to mind.

How do we avoid becoming a "bite statistic"? Remember the first axiom, "**ALL DOGS BITE**"? You have to know this and believe it. Even a dog that has always been friendly to you may change its mind or be in one of the states of mind mentioned above. Also, use this reasoning if you are a pet owner, especially if you have children.

Now link this reasoning with axiom #2, "**YOU CAN'T GET BITTEN IF YOU ARE NOT WHERE THE DOGS ARE!**" Surprisingly, Letter Carriers are bitten each year because they decide to risk their lives by delivering to a mail box that can be reached by a dog! Remember, you have just given the dog several reasons to bite you. You are on their claimed turf, they may have pack members at home, they may be chained all day and are excited to see you, you may have surprised them (let sleeping dogs lie) and god forbid, you may have entered the territory of a dog trained to attack any intruders. When approaching a home or business with a known dog (hopefully you are casing the dog warning card) make sure you aware of where the dog is supposed to be. If the dog is not properly secured or if it is tied near the mail box, move on. Jingle your keys or whistle when approaching a home with a known dog so you don't startle the animal when you arrive on the property. Use your instinct. If it doesn't seem safe, don't do it. Report the issue to your Supervisor and safety representative.

If you are confronted by an excited dog, try not to make eye contact. Try to remain as calm as you can so you don't fuel the dogs excitement. Put your satchel between you and the dog and get your dog spray ready in your free hand. If you do make eye contact, don't break it. This will make the dog believe he is dominant over you. Try to back to the safest location possible. If you decide to spray the dog, point it at the ground in front of the dog and walk the stream up to the snout and eyes. Given that you will probably be scared, trying to hit an excited dog in the face first time would be too difficult unless you are Lee Harvey Oswald. Put your foot against the door when delivering accountable mail so the dog can't push the door open to get at you. Never turn and run. If you wind up on the ground, tuck yourself into a ball and cover your ears and face. Never enter a property that has a sign stating "invisible fence".

There is no substitute for common sense when it comes to dogs and their behavior. If you are a dog owner or plan to become one, become a responsible pet owner; get the right dog for you and your family. Get your dog trained and socialized properly. As a Letter Carrier, act professionally. Case dog warning cards, report aggressive dogs and don't deliver to addresses where it is not safe. Always be prepared for what might be around the corner. Be responsible for your safety.