

City of Salisbury bites back with effective animal management initiatives

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Disclaimer:

Before we begin we would like to advise all that current and past performance is not indicator of future performance in the area of dog attacks, and that future performance is subject to many forces including legislative changes, owner's actions and not being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Its should also be recognized that Council's can only play a part of the overall strategy to reduce dog attacks within our communities, but they have an opportunity and responsibility to play a very important part.

This presentation does not provide a solution for all municipalities but it highlights a combination of strategies that have proven to be effective for the City of Salisbury.

Introduction

Dog attacks are the one area of Animal Management that can have the largest impact on a community. They have the ability to leave emotional and physical scarring as well as the potential for causing death.

Increasing dog attack statistics and wide spread media coverage of dog attacks prompted the City Of Salisbury to take this matter on and try to put the brakes on dog attacks.

A quick scan on the internet is quick to reveal that dog attacks are a common feature in recent headlines. Some of the headlines that have featured recently include those in the column opposite.

All of the mentioned articles were in 2008 and were only a snapshot of the hits that a Google search returned. It is disturbing that these issues from dog attacks are so prevalent.

It raised the questions, are the trends a result of:

- dog owners not understanding their responsibilities,
- the lack of suitable laws,
- the lack of suitable enforcement or penalties to encourage responsible ownership, or
- is it simply more effective reporting of incidents, and
- Do the stories make for great headlines in the press?

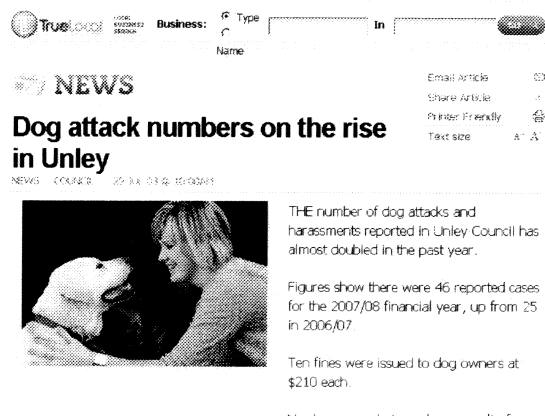
For whatever reason it is clear that Local Government is at the front lines and can do its part to reduce the incidence of dog attacks. Whilst a large percentage of attacks occur on private properties and many of these can remain unreported, many occur on public land.

In a South Australian study (Thompson, P 1991), 25% of attacks reviewed were caused by loose, uncontrolled dogs. These figures reveal a serious level of public risk. The failure of dog owners to prevent attacks in public places is clearly a matter for council action.

"The role of local government is to make community environments safe and healthy for everybody. Minimising the public risk of dog attack is an obvious part of that deal. The risk is real and regulation to minimise the risk is a necessity" (Murray, R. & Penridge, H., 2001).



Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/02/17/2164951.htm>



Source: <http://eastern-courier-messenger.whereilive.com.au/news/story/dog-attack-numbers-on-the-rise-in-unley>



Source: http://www.cairns.com.au/article/2008/05/26/4108_local-news.html

Attacking the Law

The strategy used by the City of Salisbury included a combination of education, encouragement and enforcement (City of Charles Sturt). The first area of "attack" was the law. At the time the Dog and Cat Management Act did not have any leashing laws in place for public places and as a result Council passed a by law, requiring all dogs to be on leads in all public places.

For this to occur a large public consultative process began. In regards to the leashing, two options were given;

- All dogs be leashed in all public places at all times, or
- Dogs be leashed in certain public places between certain times

The consultative process included mail outs, advertising in the Council offices, local media, and posting on the internet. The consultation process was seeking views on dog control options in the majority of public places e.g. footpaths, playgrounds, small parks, public reserves and sporting grounds.

The results of the consultative process showed overwhelming support for dogs to be leashed at all times.

The result of the consultations saw a balance of the two options. All dogs were to be leashed in all public places at all times along with times that allowed unleashed activity between 6.30pm till 8.00 am. This enabled some flexibility and off leash activity at times where parks were not at peak usage.

With the consultation process complete, a report was prepared and presented to Council recommending the adoption of a by law asking for all dogs to be leashed on all Council reserves and public places unless otherwise signed.



The result from the process that began mid 1999 the Council adopted the new By Law 10 that finally become effective on February 27th 2001.

Off Leash Parks

In order to implement a leashing by law it was paramount that Council provided the community with opportunities for off lead exercise for their dogs.

If the by law were perceived as unfair, namely if dogs were banned from all parks, and there was no other opportunities for off leash activity or exercise, then this would more than likely result in a defiant response from dog owners rather than a complaint one. Effective compliance with the by laws is related to the acceptance of its fairness and to the levels of enforcement. (Harold Jackson Pty Ltd, 1998)

To ensure a sense of fairness on the new by laws, Council's strategy for dog friendly parks was to aim for an off lead park within 1.5 kilometer radius of the majority of residential properties within the area. This goal would facilitate the ability to walk to a park or at least find one in the area within a short drive.

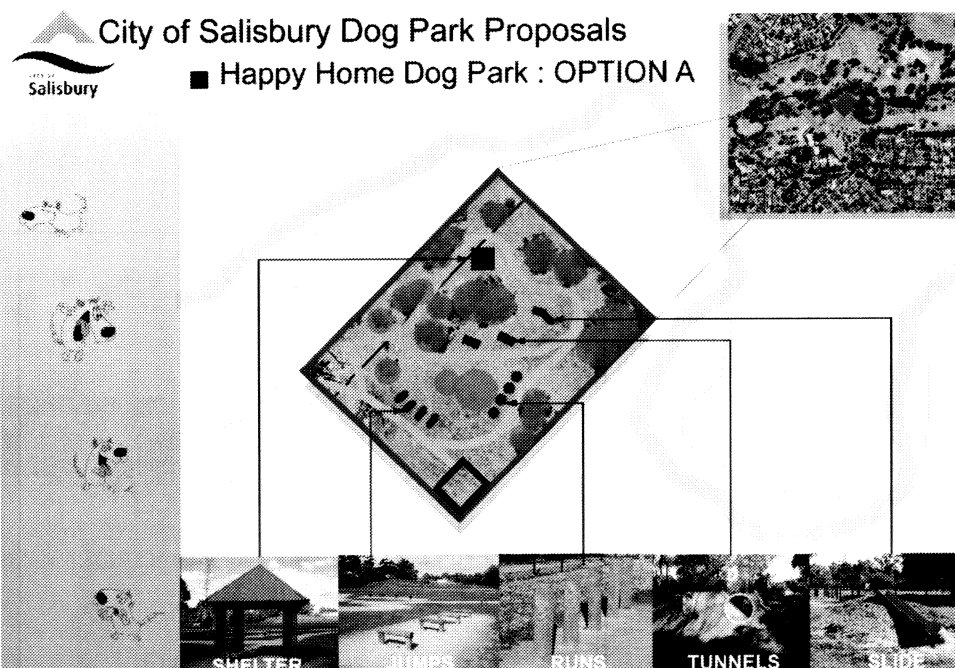
Once the locations were identified the consultation phase was implemented to identify the issues that may arise from the installation of the parks.

Public Consultation was undertaken for the proposed sites in a variety of methods, which included:

- Direct public consultation at Shopping Centres and Council Recreation Centres.
- Public displays with survey forms within the foyer of the Council Offices
- Direct letter drop to residents adjoining the proposed dog friendly parks

The consultation for the dog friendly parks included discussions with Council's Landscape design office, to ensure the proposed locations were suitable for dog friendly parks along with the development of a suitable survey to establish any resident concerns regarding the parks location, size, facilities and design. Appendix A provides a copy of the survey questions.

The designs of our parks were for fully fenced areas which balanced the natural environment of the area with the introduction of items that were interesting for dogs and their owners. The attached flyer formed part of the consultation documentations showing the facilities that were to be provided in each of the parks.



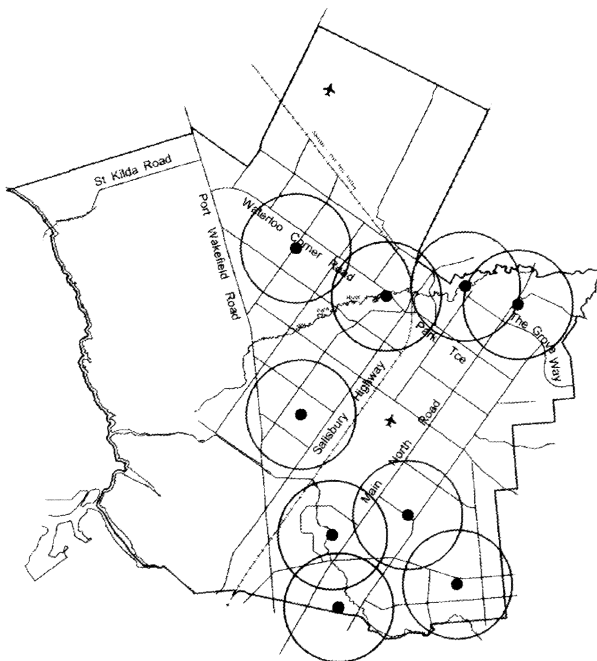
The features were designed to make the parks interesting for dogs that were active however balancing the natural environments for those that simply wanted to explore the terrain. Some parks have a more natural feel to them due to their location within existing well established vegetation and trees, and others were built from scratch requiring tree plantings as well as the facilities above to ensure they offered an interesting environment for dogs.

Additional features in all the parks are biodegradable plastic bag dispensers for users to remove faeces and water fountains for the dogs and owners.

City Coverage

The City of Salisbury now has 9 dog friendly parks and the aim was to provide all our residents with access to a park within 1.5 kilometers of all residential areas. The current model provides access for an estimated 70% of the population, as shown in the following diagram.

Dog Parks - 1.5km radius



Future consideration for an off leash area may be investigated for the Salisbury East area and other areas, based on need and or demand from the community. Currently there are no concerns being expressed by the community at the lack of these facilities. If the local community demand or express a need then the lack of a suitable location may require an alternative design and or layout to the model currently in use.

Levels of Enforcement

As mentioned earlier the level of enforcement is also critical to the success of any leashing laws that were introduced. (Harold Jackson Pty Ltd, 1998) As a result it was important that with the introduction of the new by laws would require the right level of enforcement.

Along with the support for the by law was the introduction of 2 dedicated compliance officers that were responsible for ensuring compliance with the by laws as well as educating dog owners. The officers were tasked with patrolling all parks and reserves to ensure compliance with a set amnesty period whilst the message was being communicated to the community.

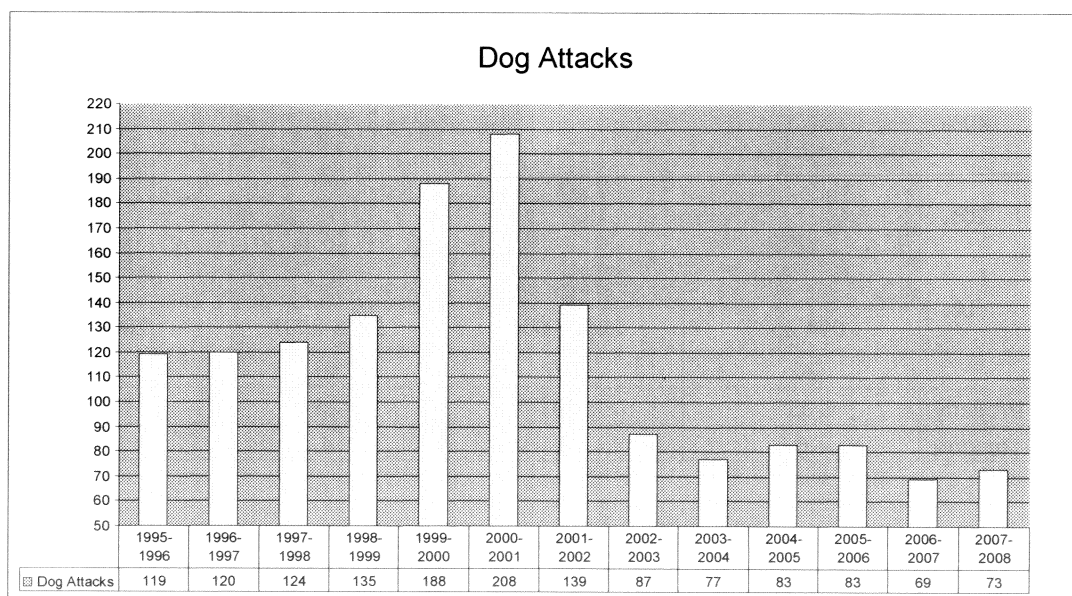
Salisbury is a large area, but also has a main reserve network following the Little Para River, which enabled the officers to be equipped with bicycles so they could get out through the reserves and approach people directly and more effectively.

This campaign along with the education displays through Council facilities and local media releases was very effective and resulted in excellent compliance levels. The level of expiations issued for dogs off lead were minimal, with only a total of 67 expiations issued since the introduction of the by laws. It should be noted that a large effort was put into education and encouragement and additional strategies included the issuing of free leads to those people found with a dog off a lead.

The changes to the Dog and Cat Management Act in 2004 saw the introduction of the Wandering at Large provisions which covered offences in public places for dogs off leads. These provisions were used for these offences upon their introduction.

What was the effect on Dog Attacks since the by-law?

An active education and enforcement campaign was also implemented to ensure we had public support and compliance. This work had a clear result on dog attack numbers with a marked decline in our attacks.



Prior to 2001 the City of Salisbury averaged 149 dog attacks per annum as a result of a steady increase, and a 39% increase in 1999-2000 with a peak in 2000-2001 at 208 attacks.

The by law was introduced in July 2001 and that year saw a dramatic decrease in dog attacks by 33% to 139 which was back to the average of the last 6 years. The immediate impact could have been attributed to the by law or could be for a statistical anomaly as a result of an out of the ordinary year in 2000-2001.

The correlation between of the by law and dog attacks was better identified in the subsequent years. In 2002-2003 the attacks reduced by 37% to 87. The average number of attacks per annum after the introduction of the by law was 87, compared to 149 prior to the by law.

In 2004 changes to the Dog and Cat management Act saw the introduction of leashing laws that covered all public areas (excluding reserves). This meant that it was now mandatory that all dogs be on a lead when in public areas such as footpaths, however Council's still had the flexibility to allow off lead activities on their Council owned reserves and parklands.

The introduction of this legislation did not have any further significant impact on the reduction of dog attacks within the City of Salisbury but the publicity helped reconfirm our message for effective leashing laws and the by laws covering our reserves and parklands.

Where do the attacks occur?

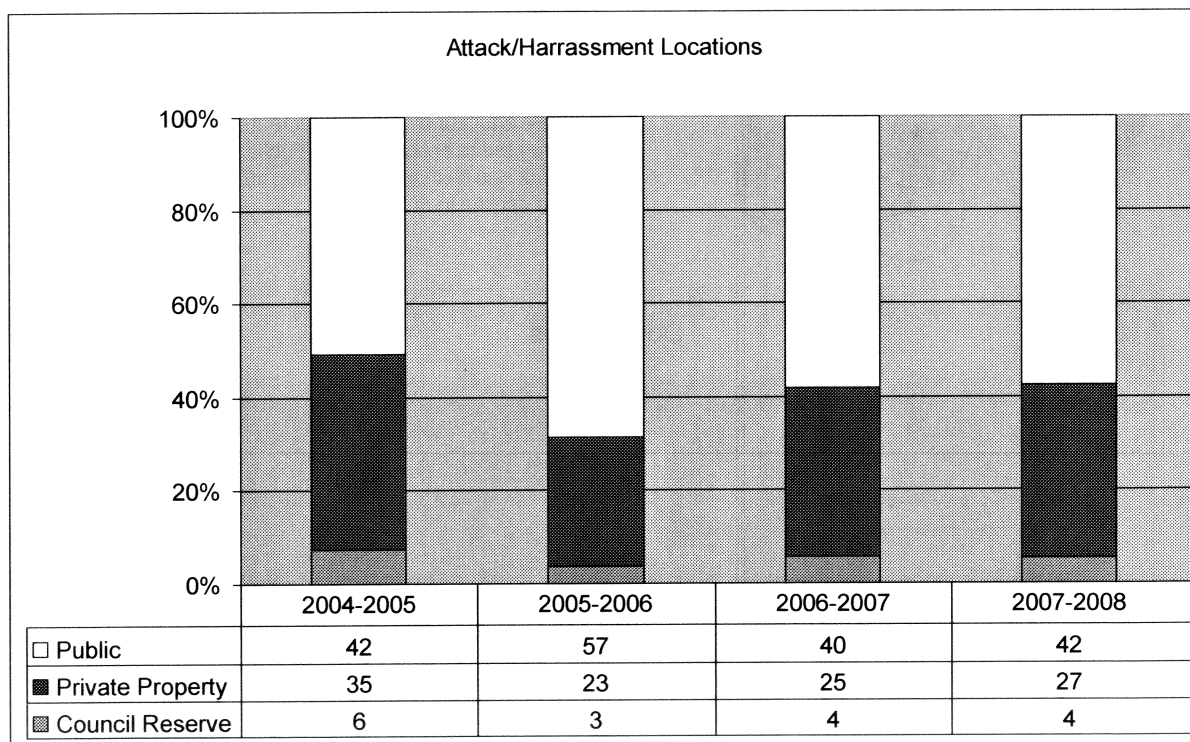
Further work was then undertaken on the statistics and it was clear we needed to identify and further analyse the data to identify the location of the attacks in order to further reduce incidents and to identify any future strategies or targeted education campaigns.

We determined if the attack occurred on private property, a public place or on a Council reserve. The collection of this data began in 2004 so we cannot provide any historical comparison to the attacks prior to this date.

After the analyses of the data it was clear that the greatest number of continuing attacks were occurring on "public land." Public land for our records is defined as footpaths and roads, and the main cause was dogs escaping from yards or houses and were wandering at large. The most common reasons heard by our officers included:

- "The gate was left open,"
- "The dog got through the roller door when I was leaving"
- "I didn't know he could jump that high"
- "Someone must have opened my gates"
- "I don't know how he climbed over the fence"
- "The thunder scared my dog"
- "The dog just bolted out the front door"

It was clear that the next phase to further reduce attacks was to target the dogs escaping from yards. This led to the development of our education campaign, "Don't let your dog roam, secure your home," in 2007. Our results clearly supported the findings of the previously mentioned South Australian study (Thompson, P 1991), that attacks were caused by loose, uncontrolled dogs. Reconfirming that dogs wandering at large pose a serious level of public risk.



In the first year the pamphlet was distributed across all Council facilities and promoted through the local media, and all persons reclaiming their wandering dog were issued with a copy.

This year, 2008, the pamphlet was distributed to all registered dog owners with their dog registration renewal notice. This targeted campaign will enable further analyses of the education strategy in an effort to identify its effectiveness. Continual promotion of the strategy will be required to reach owners of unregistered dogs that make up a large percentage of our dogs wandering at large and subsequent dog attacks.

Further analysis of data we captured was also undertaken in an effort to identify if any particular breed or breeds were responsible for the attacks and wanderings.

This analysis identified "Staffordshire bull terriers" and "Staffordshire bull terrier cross breed" type dogs as the highest number of dogs wandering at large and involved in attacks.

Data in 2006-07 revealed the following 3 breeds as the top 3 breeds impounded for wandering at large;

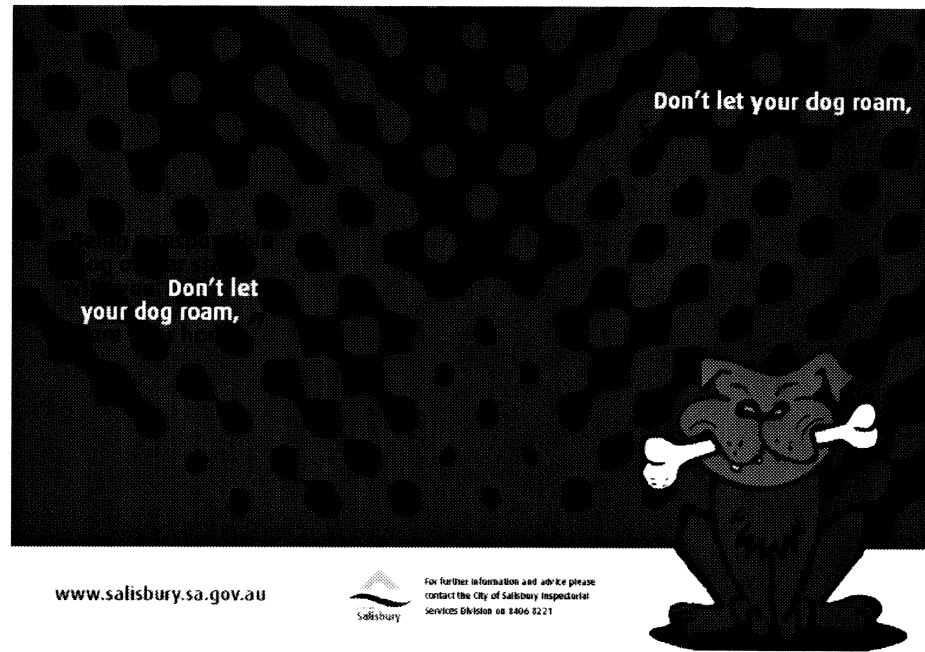
- Staffordshire bull terrier and Staffordshire cross breeds - 184
- German Shepherd - 55
- Jack Russell and Maltese - 54

There was a clear margin of difference between the Staffordshire breeds and the next breed. This was further confirmed as a link between wandering dogs and attacks where the Staffordshire breeds were involved in 33% of the investigated dog attacks.

The top 3 breeds involved in dog attacks were:

- Staffordshire bull terrier and Staffordshire cross breeds - 33%
- Rottweiler and Rottweiler cross breeds - 7%
- Cattle dog cross breeds - 6%

As this data revealed a common factor we modified our brochure to target the owner of these particular breeds. The brochure was also sent to the Staffordshire Club who gave us their input and support. The variation of the brochure focused on the dogs temperament and both positive and negative traits recognizing that they are a valued pet to many people.



Don't let your dog roam

Roaming dogs that have escaped from homes and back yards are a big concern to Council. Roaming dogs can be injured or killed, and can also attack other animals or people.

Dogs commonly escape through the following areas:

- through open front doors
- through unsecured screen doors or windows
- unlocked gates
- through open roller doors
- loose fence sheets
- jumping or climbing over fences
- digging under fences

Dogs are also more likely to escape during storms and thunder, and when fireworks occur.



Secure your home

Council would like all dog owners to take steps to secure their homes to prevent their dogs from escaping and roaming.

Steps can include:

- keep front doors closed
- secure screen doors and window screens
- lock gates and/or secure latches
- when opening roller doors keep your dog secure
- repair and maintain fences
- check fence lines for evidence of digging
- remove items from fences such as bins and boxes that may enable dogs to climb over
- provide a secure enclosure in the rear yard for your dog to prevent access to gates/fences
- keep your dog indoors when storms and thunder are predicted
- keep your dog indoors when fireworks displays are likely to occur during festive seasons and special events

Avoid the Consequences

If dogs escape the consequences can be very serious and costly.

- a roaming dog is deemed to be wandering at large and can result in a fine with a maximum penalty of \$250 plus seizure fees
- if your dog attacks or harasses it can result in a fine with a maximum penalty of \$2500
- if your dog injures or kills a person or animal you may also face civil action and be liable to compensation claims
- if your dog attacks and is deemed dangerous you may receive a dog control order
- your dog could be injured or killed by vehicles if wandering at large

So please remember to take some simple steps to keep your dog safe and secure and undertake a regular check of your surroundings.

**Don't let your dog roam,
Secure your home.**

The effectiveness of this campaign will be further analysed this year to establish if there has been any marked reduction in the incidents involving Staffordshire breeds. It is interesting to note that Staffordshire breeds also made up just over 9% of all dogs registered in the area, the second highest breed next to Maltese cross breeds at 10%.

So their prevalence along with their temperament seems to play a significant factor in the number of incidents.

What else should I know?

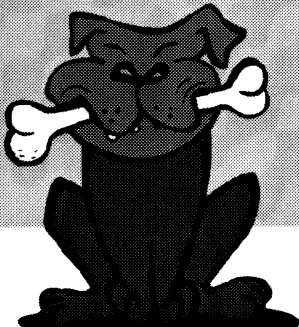
There are many cross-breeds amongst the Staffordshire world and this can alter the temperament of the dog. You must look into both of the breeds that your dog is mixed with and see the up's and down's for both.

For example, a Staffordshire X Heeler will enjoy a good run and a play with the ball and won't be so obsessed with being by your side 24 hours a day.


"Being a responsible dog owner starts with you. Don't let your dog roam, secure your home."

Don't let your dog roam, Secure your home.

Information for owners of Staffordshire Bull Terriers and Staffordshire Bull Terrier cross-breeds.



www.salisbury.sa.gov.au



For further information and advice please contact the City of Salisbury Inspectorial Services Division on 8406 8271

Don't let your dog roam, Secure your home

Staffordshire Bull Terriers

If you are an owner of a Staffordshire Bull Terrier or a Staffordshire Bull Terrier cross-breed, then you are one of many people in our area.

Staffordshire Bull Terriers and their cross breeds are one of the highest number of registered dog breeds in the City of Salisbury.

Temperament

The Staffordshire Bull Terrier does everything full-throttle; play, work and love. It is extremely courageous, obedient and affectionate, with a good sense of humour.

Staffordshire Bull Terriers are usually good with other pets in the household, but may be combative with dogs outside the family, particularly dogs of the same or related breeds.

Owners need to protect these dogs from injuring themselves as they are totally fearless and curious.

Positive traits

Positive traits of Staffordshire Bull Terriers can include:

- trusting and loyal
- intelligent and bold
- inquisitive and fearless
- happy to just be with you
- suited to family or singles
- suited to town or country properties

Negative traits

Negative traits of Staffordshire Bull Terriers can include:

- can be aggressive toward other dogs
- can be demanding for attention
- can get distraught and fret when away from owner
- will destroy gardens if not trained
- can be difficult to house train
- can be good escape artists!

Secure Your Home

Their ability to escape and roam is what causes the greatest concern. The Staffordshire Bull Terrier and Staffordshire Bull Terrier cross breeds have the highest impound rate in the Salisbury Council area each year.

Council would like all dog owners to take steps to secure their dogs from escaping and roaming. Steps can include:

- keep front doors closed
- secure screen doors and window screens
- lock gates and / or secure latches
- repair and maintain fences
- check fence lines for evidence of digging
- remove items from fences (eg. boxes, bins) that may enable dogs to climb over
- provide a secure enclosure in the rear yard
- keep your dog indoors when storms, thunder or lightning are predicted
- keep your dog inside when fireworks displays are likely to occur

Enforcing the Dog Attack Laws.

As mentioned earlier it has been stated that effective compliance with the law is related to the acceptance of its fairness and to the levels of enforcement. (Harold Jackson Pty Ltd, 1998). Enforcement action against dog attacks was also critical if we were to send a message that they won't be tolerated and the community needed to take notice of the consequences. The other area was that enforcement action is also a responsibility of Council's and not a choice in most circumstances.

Over the last 3 years, Council has issued 167 dog attack expiations and implemented 15 prosecutions. The decision to take this action is not one of revenue, and not one of gaining a conviction or publicity over the matter. In fact one of our concerns has been the lack of publicity over our successful prosecutions for dog attacks, and is something we are considering in an effort to raise awareness of the consequences of dog attacks on both the victims and the owners.

The decision to prosecute is as a result of the legislative powers provided to Council and the fact that, "it is the duty of Council's to enforce these laws, and to do so earnestly and fairly" (Kelly, P., Best Practice in Prosecutions, Norman Waterhouse Residential Seminar August 2003). Kelly, P. further states that Council officers have an obligation to ensure they act fairly to all the parties involved in the investigation and prosecutions, and that the prosecution is not about winning and losing.

"The role of the prosecutor excludes any notion of winning or losing, his function is a matter of public duty that which in civil life there can be none charged with greater personal responsibility" (Rand J in Boucher v R (1954) 110 CCC 260 at 270)

Considering whether the prosecution is in the public interest is also a factor in the decision to prosecute and this can vary depending on the seriousness, of the offence and the need for a deterrent, or the possibility of ensuring additional controls or orders from the Courts.

When our decision to prosecute is made we obviously identify all possible scenarios and ensure all work has been carried out in an effort to ensure a successful prosecution in an effort to enforce the legislation. Crucial to this process is ensuring our brief of evidence is presented to our legal advisors for advice on the evidence before any action is taken. Like any public authority accounting for expenditure is crucial however at no time do we consider the costs in our decisions to prosecute, and this is reflected in our budget for legal fees exceeding estimates over the last 3 consecutive years.

The positive outcomes from prosecutions are from the lessons we learn and many of these come from the feedback from the magistrates and when you lose a case. Some of our lessons include:

- Photographs, the more the better, especially of the victims, the dogs involved and the scene of the crime, including wide shots of locations to set the scene.
- Background information, previous history of the owners or animals, registration details, similar dog breeds registered in the proximity
- Witness credibility and their ability to stand up to cross examination. However any preparation in this area does not guarantee their performance in a court of law.

Other Agencies

Council's strategy and the success of that strategy has been shown however the full impact will be seen over the next few years. Our program cannot be seen in isolation as there is also a lot of work being done by other agencies that are all helping reduce the overall impact of dog attacks. This includes,

- The SA Dog and Cat Management Board's "Good Dog Campaign"
- Delta dog safe,
- Pet pep,
- Various training schools

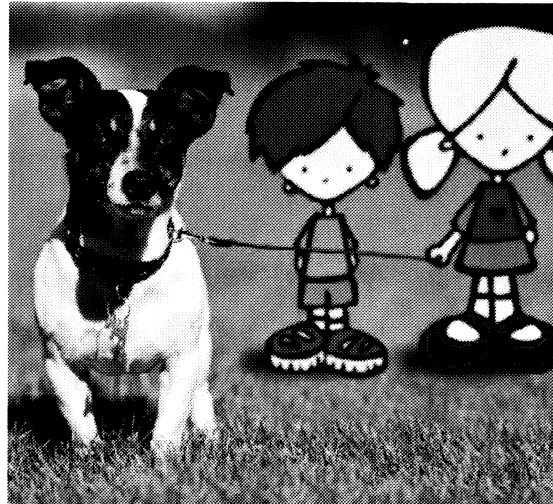
The "Good dog campaign" has been a targeted campaign to educate the community on responsible dog ownership and preventing dog attacks, including campaigns targeting children. This information is available on their web site (<http://www.gooddogsa.com/>) and has many interesting facts and information, including:

- Select a pet
- Dog behaviors/training and socialization
- Information for school projects and fun games for children to learn
- Calendar of events for pet owners
- Links to other important organizations

Good owners lead to Good Dogs

Each year, dogs bite more than 100,000 Australians.

Be a responsible dog owner.



Visit GoodDogSA.com to find out how you can become a responsible dog owner.

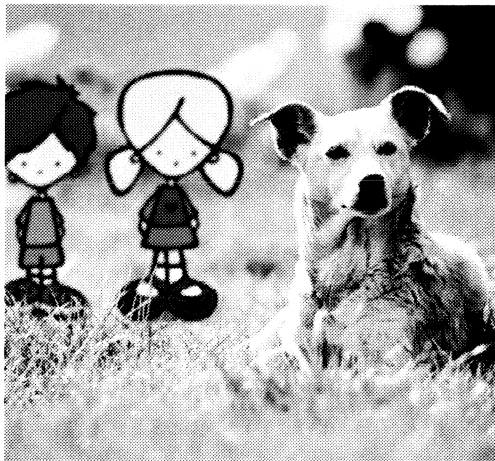
GOODDOG SA.com

An initiative of the Dog and Cat Management Board and your local council

Approach with caution

Dog bites can occur when dogs are wandering at large.

Never put a dog you don't know.



Visit GoodDogSA.com to find out how you can become a responsible dog owner.

GOODDOG SA.com

An initiative of the Dog and Cat Management Board and your local council

Conclusion

Community support for the continuation of the on leashing program continues to grow. The programs success can be attributed to the thorough research with open and broad consultation along with the active enforcement of the legislative controls.

Leashing controls have been identified as the main factor in reducing the incidents of reported dog attacks in the City of Salisbury by at least 50%.

The success of the leashing laws were as a result of their perceived fairness through the introduction of additional resources for dog owners to still have the availability to exercise their dogs off leads.

With the introduction of the first of many dog friendly parks we believe this was the reason for the little resistance Council officers received when policing the new law.

The continued success of leashing laws and the reduction of dog attacks cannot simply be through the work of our Council, Salisbury is a piece of a large pie. Many other agencies and resources have also worked extremely hard to be innovative and resourceful with there approach of this area.

The only thing that we can be sure of is if we don't all take active measures we will have more victims. So its time to "Bite Back" on dog attack statistics and make our communities a safer place.

About the Author

Darren Hurst is employed as an AMO with City of Salisbury, a position he has held for the past 14 years.

Darren is currently Team Leader of the Inspectorate and enjoys every challenge regarding animal control.



Source: <http://www.dogsinthenews.com/storypics/manbitesdog177x133.jpg>

References

1. Murray, R., and Penridge, H. 2001. Dog and Cats in the Urban Environment (<http://www.petnet.com.au/dcue/>)
2. Thompson P. 1991. Dog attacks. South Australian Health Commission Injury Surveillance Monthly Bulletin no. 29: 1-2.
3. City of Charles Sturt Animal Management Strategy
4. Harold Jackson Pty Ltd, 1998 Companion Animals in the City
5. Paul Kelly, - Best Practice in Prosecutions, Norman Waterhouse Residential Seminar August 2003).
6. <http://www.gooddogsa.com/>

Appendices

Appendix A - Survey Form

Dog Friendly Parks Proposed In Your Area

PART 1

Please Circle the range that contains your age:

16 – 25

26 – 35

36 – 55

56 – 70 71+

Do you or anyone in your household use parks/reserves in the City of Salisbury for any of the following:

(Please circle where appropriate)

Sport

Walking/Jogging

Bike Riding

Picnics/Other

Walk dog Don't use

Are you a dog owner? :

YES

NO

(if yes) Number of dogs:

PART 2

Proposed Dog Friendly Parks – Refer to the Attachments for site locations

Please refer to the attached plan showing the proposed location of the dog friendly park in your area and details of the features in the proposed park.

Could you please rate your level of satisfaction (Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory) of the following criteria and also comment on any other relevant issues.

Site Name: Mawson Lakes Dog Park – Park Way

	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Comments
Size			
Facilities			
Other coments			

If you are a dog owner would you use the dog friendly park if provided in your area?

The Gold Coast City Council provides over 90 locations in the City where people may exercise their dogs off-leash. Many of these areas are quite popular with the dog owning community and attract hundreds of users daily.

Data has shown that Australia has one of the highest levels of pet ownership per capita in the world with 85% having owned a pet at some point in their lives. With two thirds of Australian households owning pets, nearly 40% of these households own a dog.

However 60% of these dogs are not exercised and it has been reported that a daily constitutional walk is good for a dog's health and behaviour. It is a well known fact that a daily walk can improve human fitness and health. It has been widely documented that pet owners are healthier and happier than non-pet owners.

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