

Dangerous Dogs

Recent changes to legislation regarding dangerous dogs now require owners of dangerous dogs to place fluorescent red/yellow collars on the dogs when they are outside the yard. There has been a concern at state government levels that councils and owners are not taking the laws regarding dangerous dogs seriously. Is more regulation the right approach to control what is a serious issue in our society?

It would seem that the current view of state government regarding this problem is that the legislature passes a series of laws that recognize the problem but may not solve the problem because, at the implementation level, local councils need the resources to apply the legislation effectively and owners of dogs in general need to take the laws seriously. Up to this point in time the threat of fines associated with the current legislation has not stopped attacks on people or other animals. As a consequence we can assume that not all dangerous dogs have been identified and not all owners have been persuaded to take their responsibilities to their dogs and their community seriously.

What is lacking in my view is a commitment to educating dog owners and the community in general about dog behaviour and what it means to have these creatures living amongst us... the good and the bad. Well-trained dogs with good temperament can be a joy and comfort to a lot of people and families. Poorly socialized dogs and/or dogs with poor temperament have the potential to be dangerous to other animals and people of all ages.

Although there is information out there from the net, lifestyle shows, books, councils and veterinarians (e.g. A.V.A Petpep program in schools) there does not appear to be a coordinated message from government and the animal health care industry in dealing with the dangerous dog problem. There is a lot of media attention when an event happens but not much apparent follow up after the community outrage subsides.

Out of the mix of regulation and education I think that a coordinated education program has the longer-term benefit to the community and may help solve the problem. However, as usual, the question is who funds this process, implements it and monitors the effectiveness of any program that may be devised. Any ideas out there?

At an individual level there are some basics that can help. Select the appropriate breed or crossbred that suits your family situation and lifestyle. Understand that dogs are social creatures and a lot of their behaviour develops from how we treat and train them *at all of their life stages...socialization and training are critical and ongoing*. Ensure that your backyard is dog proof. Do not leave children or vulnerable older people unsupervised with dogs. Spend time with your dog...they need it and love it...so will you. Get your dog checked regularly by your vet (every 6-12 months)...pain and illness can cause apparent changes in temperament.

Useful web sites: www.ccac.net.au

http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/Restricted_and_Dangerous_Dogs_in_NSW_-_Brochure.pdf