



CIRSA LOSS ALERT

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Providing Risk Management Solutions

Avoiding Dog Bites

Dog bites can cause severe physical and emotional trauma that can be life and career changing. Since 2008, CIRSA's Workers' Compensation pool members have reported 340 animal and insect bites resulting in incurred costs of over \$394,000. Most of the severe claims are from dog bites, resulting in temporary disability and tens of thousands of dollars in medical expenses and time off work. In one instance, a police officer was attacked and bitten multiple times by several pit bulls. There was already a known history of aggressive behavior from these dogs. The bites became infected and the officer required physical therapy and time off work to recover from the wounds. This claim alone resulted in over \$11,000 in medical, indemnity and legal expenses, not to mention the physical and mental pain and suffering of the employee.

According to the American Pet Products Association (APPA), there are approximately 89 million dogs in the United States and nearly 48% of all homes now have a dog. Dog attacks are becoming more frequent and hazardous, with 4.5 million Americans bitten annually, and it is estimated that four times this many go unreported.

In 2017, alone, there were 39 U.S. dog bite-related fatalities (dogsbite.org). Some breeds of dogs can reach 200 pounds or more in size, and some types have been bred to fight over many generations.

Public Works/Utility Workers, Police Officers, Building Inspectors, and other employees encounter hundreds of dogs each month and run the risk of being attacked. Training and awareness can help reduce the number of incidents.

To avoid dog bites, remember the following tips:

- Don't hesitate to ask a dog owner to properly secure a dog BEFORE entering the property.
- While some breeds can be a greater risk than others, ALL BREEDS OF DOGS CAN AND WILL BITE!
- Employees should make a site assessment before entering a property. Stop and observe whether there are indicators of a dog's presence, such as:
 - Paths worn in the yard
 - Dog feces on the property
 - A dog house
 - Dog toys, leash, or chain
 - Barking coming from the property
 - "Beware of dog" signs
- Become familiar with different breeds of dogs and their habits.
- Dogs are hierarchical, territorial, usually submissive, and sense fear. Your body language should be confident but not aggressive, avoiding sudden or rapid movements. Never take your eyes off the dog, but avoid direct eye contact, as that may be interpreted by the dog as aggression.
- Avoid petting dogs.
- Avoid surprising a dog, especially one that is sleeping, eating, playing with a toy, or caring for puppies.

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Avoiding Dog Bites (cont.)

- Don't assume a dog is "friendly" because it's wagging its tail.
- Dogs that have NOT been spayed or neutered may be much more likely to bite than dogs that have been spayed or neutered.
- Once a problem dog is identified, inform other employees of its location. Problem dogs can often have problem owners.
- Report stray dogs to the proper authorities immediately.
- Hardhats, sunglasses, tool belts, and handheld equipment/tools can scare a dog into attacking.
- For employees who must routinely enter properties to perform work, a communication system should be created that makes the following information available to all affected employees:
 - What kind of dog is on the property?
 - How is the dog kept? Is there a fence (what is its condition?), kennel, chain, etc.?
 - Have problems with the dog been reported in the past?
- If attacked by a dog, have something you can put between the dog and yourself, whether it's a clipboard, tool, jacket, hard hat, or gloves. Let the dog grab onto something and tug on it. Don't let go of the object, and back out to a safe place. Never turn and run away from the dog. If you are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands and arms, protecting your ears and neck, and remain motionless until it is safe to leave the area.
- If employees are equipped and carry pepper spray, ensure they receive documented training in its proper handling and use.
- If bitten, inform your supervisors and animal control/police immediately to help reduce the likelihood of future attacks.
- Immediately and thoroughly wash the wound with soap and warm water, and contact your designated medical provider for additional medical care and advice. If you are in severe medical distress, call 911 immediately.

For additional information on the subject, visit the following websites: The Humane Society of the United States, www.hsus.org; www.dogsbite.org; www.bulliray.com; The American Veterinary Medical Association, www.avma.org; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov.