



City of La Quinta

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Les Johnson, Community Development Director

DATE: March 17, 2015

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT REPORT – RESPONDING TO AND ADDRESSING
DOG BITES

One of the many responsibilities of the City's Code Compliance/Animal Control Division is to respond to and address dog bite incidents. La Quinta Municipal Code ("Code") Title 10 provides standards and procedures used for such incidents. The following provides a general summary of the procedures followed:

- Upon being notified of a dog bite, staff responds to the location where the incident occurred and investigates. City staff responds during regular business hours Monday through Saturday. Riverside County Animal Control responds after hours, holidays, and all day Sunday.
- Once the initial investigation is complete, staff determines if the dog bite is unlawful according to the Code, and if so, an administrative citation is issued. It is also determined at this time if the dog is vicious or dangerous, if substantial injury was sustained, and if there is any aggressive history with the dog.
- If the dog is determined to be vicious or dangerous, staff subsequently determines if the owner can properly restrain the dog, or if it needs to be taken into custody and restrained at the County Animal Shelter. The Code provides staff the authority to require the dog to be quarantined at the County Animal Shelter.
- If substantial injury is determined, the dog is taken into custody and restrained at the County Animal Shelter. The quarantine period is for ten days.

- Once a dog has been determined to be vicious or dangerous, a notice to restrain is issued to the dog owner. The notice will identify if (a) the dog is required to be properly confined and maintained pursuant to the Code or (b) if the dog is to be humanely euthanized.
- Once a notice is issued, the dog owner has ten days to appeal the declaration. The owner is entitled to an administrative hearing before a hearing officer for the purpose of determining whether the animal constitutes a dangerous or vicious animal and/or if humane euthanizing is appropriate, if identified. Administrative hearings are held no less than 5 days, but not more than 30 days from the written appeal.

When considering the number of dogs in La Quinta, the number of bite cases is very low. For example, as of December 31, 2014, there were 1,649 dog licenses registered with the City and 11 bite cases reported in 2014. In addition, two dogs have been humanely euthanized over the past 5 years due to a bite incident. Each dog bite incident is taken very seriously, and handled, and investigated on a case-by-case basis. The degree of injury, history of the dog, and the circumstances surrounding the bite incident are all considered. Decisions are made in the interest of public safety, and are guided by Code requirements. These decisions provide the owner of the biting dog an appeal process, with an unbiased reviewer via hearing officers, and potentially Superior Court judges, or commissioners.

Occasionally dog owners are unable to meet the restraining order conditions, and either voluntarily sign their dog over for destruction or, after 30 days, their dog is considered abandoned and humanely euthanized. Some dog owners may immediately sign their dog over after a bite incident, as they do not want to take the chance of a reoccurrence, or the liability. These procedures have been in force and effect with minimal changes over the past several years. City staff is currently considering changes to address dogs being brought into the community that were declared vicious or dangerous by another jurisdiction. Other communities and Riverside County prohibit this; however, in La Quinta it is currently allowed.