

## **CHANGES TO THE DANGEROUS DOGS ACT**

### **ADVICE TO OWNERS**

*The amended Dangerous Dogs Act comes into effect in England and Wales on 13 May 2014. This law applies to all dog owners no matter what size or breed, whether your pet is a Chihuahua, a Cockapoo or a Collie cross.*

### **Which elements of the existing Dangerous Dogs Act should dog owners be aware of?**

Section 3 of the Act applies to every single dog owner in England and Wales. Under this section, it is a criminal offence for the person in charge of the dog to allow it to be 'dangerously out of control' in a public place.

*A dog doesn't have to bite to be deemed dangerous in the eyes of the law*

Generally if a dog bites a person, it will be presumed to have been 'dangerously out of control', however even if the dog does not bite, but gives the person grounds to feel that the dog may injure them, the law still applies.

Not many dog owners are aware of this, and it is important to hold that thought when looking at the changes.

### **What's changing on 13 May?**

While owners need to be fully aware of all the changes, the biggest difference from now on is the Act also covers incidents on private property in addition to public spaces. This includes your own house and both front and back gardens.

In addition:

- It will now be an offence for your dog to attack an assistance dog (Guide Dog, Hearing Dog etc).
- Prison sentences will be increased for those convicted of some offences
- Police or an appointed local authority now have powers to seize a dangerously out of control dog in a private place. The existing legislation already covers public places.

## **What should dog owners be doing now?**

### *Ensure your gardens are safe*

The most important point to consider is how to keep unexpected visitors or delivery drivers safe on your property. The requirement for the law to cover private places as well as public ones has long been campaigned for by the Communication Workers Union. Numerous Royal Mail and other delivery services employees are injured by dog bites each year and up until now there has not been the legislation to enable action to be taken to ensure their future safety.

You need to make sure that any visitor can safely access your front door without encountering your dog.

There is a slight grey area in these changes in that if the person attacked is a burglar or trespasser your dog may not be considered dangerously out of control if it is in a building that is your private dwelling at the time of the attack. However, this does not cover incidents in your back or front garden so while the law is yet to be tested, all dog owners should ensure that all areas of their gardens where their dogs could encounter unexpected visitors are secure.

If necessary it is also worth talking to your neighbours and asking them not to let their children climb your fences to retrieve balls etc to be on the safe side.

### *Manage your dog when someone knocks*

We all know that fewer letters are being sent through the post, but the rise in internet shopping means that more parcels and especially signed for parcels are being delivered, which requires the delivery person to knock at the door. This change in legislation should be a wake up call to all dog owners to ensure their dogs are under control when they open the door otherwise they risk committing a criminal offence.

It is not unusual for a dog to be reactive to any visitor to your door, so you need to decide now how you are going to manage that situation. The easiest thing to do is to shut your dog in another room or in the garden, provided of course the dog cannot access the front door from the garden. If that is not an option, then you will need to seek the services of an experienced or qualified dog trainer or behaviourist to teach your dog some new behaviours around the door.

You also need to consider how your dog greets people. What you view as a dog being friendly by jumping up at visitors may be seen as threatening behaviour by a stranger.

**Owning a dog is a huge responsibility and should not be taken lightly, however by taking some time to think about what these changes mean to you and your dog, you will be taking steps to keep everyone safe and avoid ending up in a position that no one wants to find themselves in.**