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## 'No such thing as a dog that won't bite'

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The image of a dog chasing a mailman might seem cartoonish to most people. But for letter carriers, it's a daily source of anxiety.

For Ann Crone, a Cape Coral mail carrier for 22 years, it is a recurring nightmare. She has been bitten twice while delivering packages, most recently in January 2007 when a 70-pound Gordon setter chewed one of her fingers and tore her uniform off.

"I was his prey," Crone said. "If the owners had not been home, it would have kept going until it killed me."

Six U.S. Postal Service workers were harmed by dogs in the Fort Myers area last year, and one has already been bitten this year, according to Postal Service spokeswoman Debra Mitchell.

In the entire postal district, which stretches from Tampa to Naples, there were 36 dog attacks on postal workers in 2007 and 53 in 2006, Mitchell said.

As part of National Dog Bite Prevention Week every year, Mitchell said the Postal Service tries to have an event to raise awareness of attacks. On Friday, Crone shared her story with fellow letter carriers at the Cape Coral Post Office as officials from Lee County Animal Services offered training on how to prevent dog attacks.

Animal Services spokeswoman Ria Brown said 1,200 dog bites were reported in Lee County last year, so it is a problem for more than just postal workers.

"Anyone who goes to people's doors as part of their job is at risk," Brown said. That includes meter readers, delivery services and police officers, among others. But few go to so many doors on a daily basis as mail carriers.

Roughly 800,000 people, half of those children, get hospitalized with dog bites in the United States each year, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. About 4.7 million dog bites get reported each year, the association said.

Workers were told to avoid making eye contact with dogs, and not to run past and provoke the animals. Should the dogs attack, workers were told to try to get the animals on their backs, and to get a package or mail crate between themselves and the animals.

But Brown also stressed that the dog-owning public needs to be careful with animals and keep them contained. While many dogs would never hurt an owner or family member, she stressed, they likely will act differently toward strangers.

That is something letter carrier carrier Mike Daniel is painfully aware of.

"There is no such thing as a dog that won't bite," he said.

- Letter carrier Melinda Small pets pit bull mix McLovin after a presentation by Lee County Animal Services during National Dog Bite Prevention Week.

Daniel was bitten 29 years ago, shortly after starting his job with the the postal service. As he walked to a Chicago home and saw an animal, Daniel said, the owner assured him the dog would never bite. But it did.

Postal worker Cruz Candelaria was also bitten last year. While delivering a package in Cape Coral, a man was waiting for a package with a dog at his side, but the dog attacked the mailman as he walked up the drive.

"He pinched me on the back of my leg," Candelaria said. "It could have been much worse. I turned sideways when I saw it coming or else it would probably have gotten my whole leg."

When these attacks happen, the Postal Service stops sending mail to people's front doors, Crone said. When she delivers mail to the home now, a package gets dropped off next door or residents just get a note to pick the package up at the post office.

"They say this wouldn't ever happen again," she said. "I'll never know. We won't be there for a second time."

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