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Dog law fails to curb attacks

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TOUGH new dog laws introduced three years ago have failed to significantly reduce the number of serious dog attacks in South Australia.

Figures obtained by *The Advertiser* show 184 people were taken to emergency departments because of dog attacks last financial year, compared to 190 the year before. Of the 2175 dog attacks reported to councils across the state, almost 1500 were in metropolitan areas.

And the number of dogs roaming the streets has stayed fairly stable at just over 13,000 since tougher laws to keep dogs under control were introduced in mid-2004.

Despite legislation requiring dogs to be kept on a leash at all times in public places, the reduction in attacks requiring hospital treatment was "not statistically significant", according to the Dog and Cat Management Board annual report.

Many more bite victims were treated by general practitioners, but policies to make reporting these injuries compulsory are still being developed by councils.

Across the state, only 15 dogs have been placed on the declared dogs database, which was established by the board a year ago to track dogs that have a history of threatening behaviour.

The Environment and Heritage Department has defended the system, saying staff are still working on a way to link the information supplied by councils and hospitals "in a meaningful manner".

Staffordshire bull terriers were the breed most likely to be reported for an attack, with twice as many attacking people as the next most reported breed, the cattle dog. Dog attacks have decreased slightly from 6.6 a day in 2004-05 to 5.9 a day in 2005-06.

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