

Pit bull ban is no solution

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In deciding what to do about pit bull terrier attacks, our legislators must look closely at the nature and frequency of these attacks as well as their underlying causes.

Legislators should also look at how other jurisdictions have addressed the issue -- and which of those prescriptions have worked.

What didn't work in the Netherlands was a ban on pit bull terriers. Legislators have decided to cancel the 15-year-old ban because it hasn't reduced the number of dog bites. Instead, the country plans to test dogs that are aggressive.

An example of a strategy that appears to be working -- to a point -- comes from San Francisco.

The San Francisco Chronicle says compulsory sterilization has dramatically reduced the population of pit bulls. Where they used to account for three-quarters of the dogs in San Francisco animal shelters, they now represent one-quarter.

San Francisco's law came after a pit bull killed a 12-year-old boy. The Netherlands adopted its law in 1993 after a pit bull killed three children. Ontario banned pit bulls in 2005 soon after a pit bull attacked a two-and-half-year boy and his mother as she tried to rescue him.

An attack this week in Montreal and the seizure of four dogs from a B.C. man have renewed calls for a ban in B.C.

Would a ban have the desired effect? We don't think so, because a ban wouldn't address the underlying causes.

Dog advocates who oppose breed bans argue that breeds aren't the problem. Yes, pit bulls accounted for a third of fatal dog attacks in the U.S. from 1979 to 1998. However, as author Malcolm Gladwell noted in *New Yorker* magazine, the rate of fatal dog attacks has remained relatively constant, going back many decades to when Dobermans topped the fatal-dog-bite list.

That's why San Francisco's approach, as successful as it seems, needs to be kept in context. Neutering male pit bulls is an effective way to calm aggressive tendencies and keep the pit bull population down. The pit bull population has dropped and we should expect to see fewer pit bull attacks.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, however, if another aggressive breed, such as the Rottweiler, becomes more popular and accounts for a disproportionate level of dog attacks.

The anti-social types will simply turn to other macho breeds. A pit bull ban, in isolation, is not the answer.

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