

## Calgary finds the laws to stop dog bites and shelter crowding

By **Pet Life Examiner**, Sharon Sakson  
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Calgary, Canada, seems to be a beacon of light in the controversy over how to reduce dog bites and unwanted pets. We keep trying to find the right legislation to pass that will end the problem. No town has come close -- except Calgary.

They've done it by enforcing laws that require the owners of pets to responsible for them. Responsible for keeping them on leash, keeping them quiet, keeping them from being a threat to the community, keeping them from ending up in public shelters, keeping them from producing unwanted puppies.

They have addressed issues of dog bites, dog licensing compliance and the enforcement of animal-related laws.

Calgary's dog population is estimated to be about 110,000 animals. About 101,000 (92%) are licensed. Anyone failing to license their dog faces a fine of \$250 -- considerably more than most cities, making it a cheaper alternative to license your dog than to not license him.

The same fine -- \$250 -- is levied against anyone charged with not cleaning up after their dogs in public areas. Police are instructed to patrol and enforce this rule.

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Most cities the size of Calgary (1.2 million people) deals with thousands of dog bite incidents each year. Calgary had 145 cases in 2008 and 80 incidents so far this year.

If police have to get a court order to have a troublesome or ill dog destroyed, that dog's owner pays the fees associated with having the animal put down. If a dog has been declared vicious and bites again, its owner pays thousands of dollars in fines.

One woman was fined \$18,000 when her two border collies constantly bit people. She never obeyed the conditions placed on her so her dogs were declared vicious and destroyed.

Bill Bruce, Calgary's director of animal and bylaw services and the municipality's chief bylaw enforcement officer says the program emphasizes holding the owner accountable. "We have built an entire program that is not an animal control program — it's a responsible pet ownership program," he told The Western Star newspaper. "It starts from the first time we see trouble with a dog, it's a process of education and enforcement to create change to get the dog owner to take responsibility."

All dog bites are investigated. "No dog is entitled to bite under any circumstance, unless it's something like you accidentally stepped on it and it nipped you," said Bruce.

Calgary's program is a \$5-million-a-year operation funded entirely from licenses of animals and penalties for violations. It costs \$31 to license a spayed or neutered dog for a year. Licensing an intact animal costs \$52. An animal can be licensed 24 hours a day, seven days a week over the phone or on the city's website.

The animal control office inserts a microchip containing a wide range of information about the animal in every pet adopted from the shelter. Microchips are not mandatory, but pet owners are encouraged to do so.

Licensing a dog also means the animal will be returned to the owner without question the first time it gets lost or loose. "We've added value to having your dog licensed with our 'return to owner' program," said Bruce.

The responsible pet owner program in Calgary is based on four principles: licensing and permanently identifying the pet, spaying or neutering, properly socializing and taking care of the animal's health and not allowing the pet to become a nuisance to the community.

"We don't need a lot of complicated laws or take measures like banning breeds. We don't limit how many animals you can have. We just hold you to those four principles."

Some great ideas there. City officials in other

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