



LAW ENFORCEMENT RISK MANAGEMENT *BULLETIN*

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Dogs: Tips for a Safe Encounter

According to the American Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are approximately 77.5 million dogs in the United States, and domestic canines are likely to be encountered in 39 percent of residential locations. Add that to the law enforcement officer's encounters with dogs during traffic stops and calls to businesses, and the threat of a dog attack can be not only possible, but probable. The following tips and techniques, taken from an article written by Gary P. Maddox, PhD., Director of Code 3 Associates Animal Disaster Response & Animal Welfare Training and published by *Police Chief Magazine*, can be used by departments to increase humane encounters between dogs and officers, and reduce the occurrence of canine attacks on law enforcement personnel.

Aggression, Body Language, and Officer Behaviors

Maddox teaches officers that while animal aggression can take many forms, aggressive behavior in dogs usually falls within four categories:

1. Fear Aggression- the most common type of display, fear aggression occurs when a dog feels it cannot escape a threatening situation. This dog will typically not attack, but will bark and growl, and may bite or nip when the officer's back is turned.
2. Dominance Aggression- an "alpha" dog may feel threatened by a trained officer's stance and may attack to defend its rank. This type of dog will assert its dominance with an attack to the front of an officer's body and will usually attempt to bite at the stomach, legs, or neck. Thankfully, a dog with dominance aggression is easy to spot and will give clear signals of a pending attack, giving an officer time to move away.
3. Prey Drive Aggression- This type of aggression is stimulated by the same actions that would cause it to attack food or sport prey such as birds, rabbits, or squirrels. While small children are most vulnerable to this dog's aggression, an officer may invoke an attack with quick, sudden movements.
4. Territorial Aggression- likely stemming from a combination of fear, dominance, and instinct, an attack from this dog will occur when an officer encroaches upon its living space.

Maddox also suggests by gaining a basic understanding of common dog posturing, officers can avoid an attack. Are the dog's ears held back, suggesting fear, or held up in an unwavering position, signaling dominance? Does the dog blink repeatedly in submission, or is he wide-eyed and ready to fight? Are Fido's lips pushed forward; does he lick his lips repeatedly; is he yawning? Don't mistake these for a thirsty or tired pup—an attack may be imminent.

An officer's body language can trigger an attack also. While tactical communications skills such as "squared and forward shoulders", body positioning, and direct eye contact may be effective when working with human subjects, these techniques send totally different signals to a dog. When a dog presents itself forward-facing and "squared off" to another dog, it is asserting its dominance and warning of an attack. Looking a dog directly in the eyes will also be interpreted as aggression. When faced with a uniformed officer in dominant, aggressive position, Fido may respond by attacking before he can be attacked.

Diffusing the Threat

The “Bark, Stop, Drop, and Roll” technique, developed by the American Humane Association (AHA), may help officers avoid dog attacks. The technique, which AHA says is effective in more than 90 percent of encounters, speaks to the dog in its own language, alleviating fear and communicating to the dog that the officer means “no fight”.

Bark- officer determines dog’s presence by either hearing or seeing it.

Stop- officer assesses the dog’s intentions through its posturing and body language.

Drop- officer drops his or her eyes and used peripheral vision to avoid direct eye contact.

Roll- officer rolls his or her shoulder in a smooth, slow motion and moves to a standing position that is sideways to the dog. This signals to the dog no aggression is intended.

If an attack is imminent, officers may avoid injury by yelling “STOP” in a low, loud voice. If the dog is very close or rapidly approaching, properly deployed pepper spray may hinder the attack. The baton may be used by placing it sideways in the dog’s mouth to deflect a bite, but an officer should NEVER use the baton to strike at or hit the dog.

The key to safety is prevention—always require the dog owner to secure the dog prior to your investigation when possible. A dog’s attitude can change rapidly during a tense situation.

For more information on officer response training, visit AHA’s website at www.humane.org, or contact AMRRP’s Eric Duthie or Mike Branham at (602) 996-8810.