

A PETS ADVISER SPECIAL REPORT

GUNNED DOWN

Why are so many dogs being shot by police?



PART 1

Why are so many dogs being shot by the police?

Page 2

PART 2

How misconceptions about “aggressive” breeds play a role in police shootings.

Page 7

PART 3

Retired deputy: Some police “jumping off the deep end” on dog shootings

Page 10

PART 4

Victim speaks out: “The police killed my dog.” Here’s what happened in the weeks after that.

Page 13

PART 5

Little by little, more police officers are being trained to deal with dogs.

Page 15

REACTION

Pets Adviser readers react to our special report. Read what they have to say.

Page 18

MAY 2013

Why are so many dogs being shot by police officers?

by Pets Adviser

On a chilly night in late February in Fishers, Ind., Patricia McConnell was taking her daughter's 7-year-old, 20-pound terrier mix, Reese, out for a midnight potty.

Reese was harnessed and on a retractable leash, but as she bounded ahead around a corner, the dog saw a neighbor and started to bark.

PART ONE Unfortunately, this neighbor was Chief Deputy U.S. Marshal William "Buzz" Brown. Reese was able to bark only two times before the deputy shot the leashed dog twice.

Brown, who says he felt threatened, was two feet away from the dog when he thought she might attack him. Amazingly, Reese survived. However, because she was shot at such a close range, Reese's front left leg and shoulder had to be removed, and her back left leg was left shattered. The vet bills reached \$10,000.

Patricia McConnell said the shooting was so unexpected that she feared that if she said anything, the officer would fire at her as well. Her daughter, Deborah Twitty, told Fox59 that they live in fear of their neighbor. "I'm afraid he's going to retaliate," she said of the deputy.

U.S. Attorney Kerry Forestal responded to the public outcry that followed by saying, "I trust Chief Deputy Brown's ability to make decisions on a daily basis, and I continue to trust him."

Reese is very lucky to be alive — many dogs that have encounters involving police and guns don't survive.

What's going on?

Recently, there has been a steady drip of awful stories like the one above. Most of them occur when a law enforcement officer feels threatened by a dog and makes a split-second decision to shoot. Sometimes, as with Reese, the dogs are leashed — or even tied up in their own yard. There are even shootings where it turns out the dogs were running away or hiding.



A New York City police officer shoots a dog named Star, who was protecting her injured owner, August 13, 2012. By: Gothamist

Because there are no national records or a centralized database of dog shootings, it's hard to tell if incidents are on the rise in the United States. However, a review by Pets Adviser of "use of force" statistics from several large cities shows no notable uptick in these cases. In fact, in New York City the yearly number of dog shootings by police is far below the inflated numbers of the late 1990s (43 dogs shot in 2011 versus an average 82 per year in 1996-98; numbers include vicious dog attacks).

The increased attention to these cases in recent months appears to be due to heightened awareness, more extensive media coverage and social networking buzz when a shooting occurs. The shootings occur so often, in fact, that a certain numbness has started to set in. One commenter online wryly remarks, "Same story. Family. Dog. Cops. Dog shot. Dog dead. Family bereaved. Shooting justified. No matter what. Repeat."



Stacy Fields (in purple) gets a hug during a vigil for her dog Kincaid, killed by Baltimore police on New Year's Day 2013.
By: Matthew Mahlstedt for Pets Adviser

Pit bulls are #1 victim

The idea that pit-bull-type breeds are aggressive has led to many of these dogs being labeled as “threatening” by cops and shot dead with minimal provocation, sometimes in the dogs’ own yard. Pets Adviser found that around 75 to 85 percent of dogs shot by police are pit bulls.

This is not to say that other dog breeds haven’t suffered as well. German shepherds, Rottweilers, Labrador retrievers, terriers, Shar-Peis, even registered therapy and service dogs — all have been victims.

Just a few egregious examples:

- Late last summer in Spartanburg, S.C., a sheriff’s deputy shot dead an 8-year-old shepherd mix named **Diamond** who was tied to the front porch.
- “Why did you shoot my dog?” the owner pleaded. The officer’s response: “She tried to bite me.” Diamond was at the end of her restraint when she was shot, according to the dog’s owner.
- One night in April 2011, police in Camden, N.J., sprayed a neighborhood with gunfire to take down a pit bull puppy named **Capone** — even as one lone police officer pleaded, “Don’t shoot him!” Witnesses say more than 30 bullets were fired, ricocheting across vehicles and piercing a home. “It was like a war zone,” one startled resident recalls.
- A Gulfport, Miss., police officer investigating a possible break-in at the house next door fired five or six times at an 11-year-old dog named **Melmo** in the dog’s own backyard. Making matters

worse, Melmo was on a chain that ended “about 30 feet away” from the officer, according to the dog’s owner.

- A Newfoundland named **Rosie** who had escaped from her home was Tased multiple times, then executed by officers in Des Moines, Wash. A dashboard video of the long ordeal shows officers wondering aloud what to do with the dog if they catch her — then they conclude, “We should just shoot [her].” They chase her down to finish the job. Another officer hollers “Nice!” when Rosie is shot. A witness says the officers high-fived one another afterward.
- Everything was friendly and conversational when a man in Kingman, Ariz., left his 2-year-old pit bull dog outside with police while he stepped inside his home to retrieve his ID. He told the officers that the dog, **Blue**, wouldn’t bite and says the officers seemed comfortable. Moments later, there was a loud pop outside. A neighbor says he saw a deputy fire his weapon as the dog casually walked by the group of officers. The neighbor also says he overheard another officer tell the shooter, “Go sit in your cruiser and keep your mouth shut.” The official police report claims the dog was charging and aggressive.
- On New Year’s Day of this year, a pit bull mix named **Kincaid** was barking at a man running from police who had trespassed into his yard. Baltimore police shot six times at the dog; half the shots missed Kincaid and his owner (who was reaching for the dog’s harness) by only inches. Kincaid died on the scene.

- A miniature bull terrier puppy named **Colonel**, who had just wandered out of his home in a bustling Chicago neighborhood, was shot twice by an officer who happened to be out front writing a parking ticket. Multiple witnesses say the puppy was simply sniffing a tree about a car-length away from the police officer who shot him. Colonel is lucky to be alive after five hours of emergency surgery.
- **Baby Girl**, a pit bull mix who was so sweet that one of her best friends was a rabbit, was taken to a dog park on Staten Island, N.Y., when a fight broke out between two other dogs. While those other dogs were being separated, the police were called. When they arrived, witnesses say Baby Girl got scared and ran toward the woods. Officers shot and gravely wounded her. Baby Girl held on through several surgeries as her family prayed she would pull through; however, she died a few days later.

Deadly consequences

The biggest factor in the shootings appears to be insufficient training of officers in dog behavior and non-lethal conflict resolution when dealing with animals. Jim Crosby, a retired deputy in Jacksonville, Fla., says, “There’s no training that I’m aware of, nothing cohesive.... That’s a tool the officers haven’t been given even though they are given extensive training on everything else you can think of.”

Seen through the eyes of someone with little or no experience with dogs, a family pet bounding toward the door can easily be mistaken as a dog about to attack. If that person at the door has a badge and a gun, the consequences can be deadly.

About this free report

This report—“Gunned Down: Why Are So Many Dogs Being Shot by Police?”—comprises a five-part series of articles that appeared on the Pets Adviser website (petsadviser.com) in early May 2013.

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Police Officers Killed On Duty Over Past 50 Years

by a yellow jacket or bee sting ²
4,143 by gunfire
by a cow ¹ ⁰ by a dog

Sources:
[http://www.odmp.org/search/year/\(1963-2012\)](http://www.odmp.org/search/year/(1963-2012))
<http://www.odmp.org/officer/18983-trooper-jack-p-holland-ii>
<http://www.odmp.org/officer/20796-deputy-sheriff-robert-leo-britton-jr>

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Police officers shoot thousands of dogs per year, according to former officer Jim Osorio, who is now a specialist at the National Humane Law Enforcement Academy, which provides instruction to police departments. The question is, are there that many “aggressive” dogs? If so, why aren’t we seeing more dog attacks on mail carriers? “Just because a dog barks doesn’t mean it’s an aggressive dog,” says Osorio.

In fact, fewer than 1 percent of U.S. Postal Service workers are bitten by dogs. Unlike most police officers, postal employees are annually shown a two-hour video on canine behavior and given further training on “how to distract dogs with toys, subdue them with voice commands, or, at worst, incapacitate them with Mace,” according to journalist Radley Balko, who has written extensively on this topic.

A mail carrier told Pets Adviser, “I rarely feel scared of the pets that people have. In fact, I really like saying hi to the dogs when they come to greet me. I’m always armed with a Milk Bone and Mace just in case, though.”

The ASPCA and the Humane Society are two groups that offer to provide police departments with free training classes for dealing with dogs, but only a few departments choose to participate, they say.

Seeking justice in the courts

Pet owners do have one ace up their sleeve: the court system. Cases that have made their way through

the legal system in recent years demonstrate that judges no longer accept that family pets can be shot dead simply as a matter of procedure.

The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, for example, ruled in favor of the Hells Angels in a case where police officers shot two dogs during a raid. Calling the shootings “unreasonable seizure,” the court chastised the police for failing “to develop a realistic plan for incapacitating the dogs other than shooting them.”

The Hells Angels eventually received a total of nearly \$1.8 million in a settlement.

Scott Heiser, senior attorney and criminal justice program director of the Animal Legal Defense Fund, tells Pets Adviser that three major things account for unjustified police shootings of dogs:

- Poor training of police officers on matters of deadly force
- Internal reviews of the shootings that are “less than objective”
- The failure of victims to file a lawsuit and aggressively seek justice through the courts

According to Heiser, more people who lose their pets in unnecessary shootings should file suit, citing the constitutional protection against unlawful seizures (Fourth Amendment). “If the Hells Angels can win one of these cases, other victims in these types of cases can too,” he says.

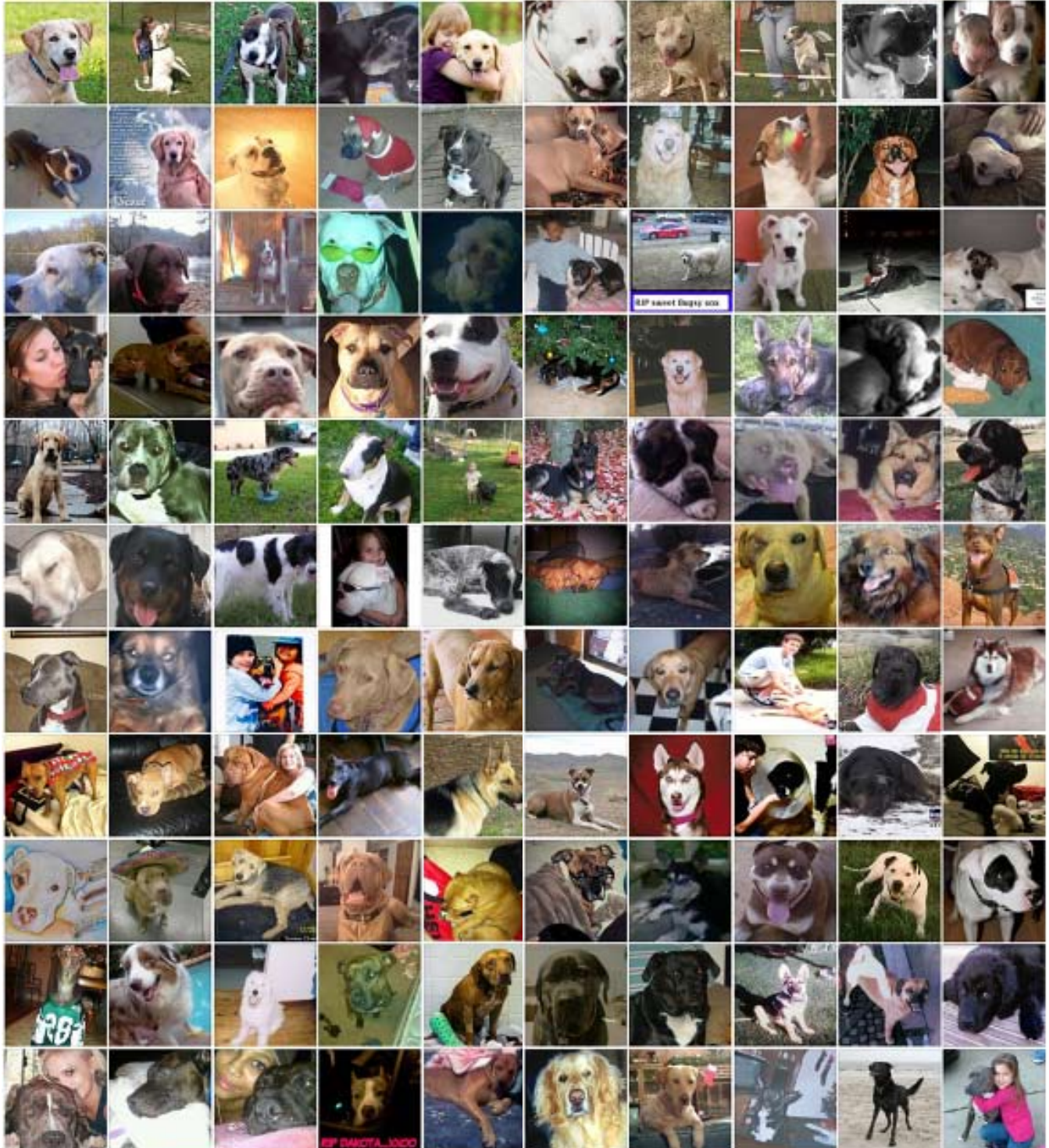
As the saying goes, money talks. A growing number of high-dollar judgments against police departments are slowly creating change. More cities are beginning to mandate enhanced police training in non-lethal ways to deal with dogs, according to Osorio.

Institutional change moves at a snail’s pace, so these are welcome developments. ■

David Deleon Baker, Clarissa Fallis, Kristine Lacoste and Sarah Blakemore contributed reporting to this article.

Photos of the victims

Here are just a few of the dogs shot by police, 2008-12.



SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FACEBOOK PAGE **DOGS SHOT BY POLICE**

Misconceptions about “aggressive” breeds play role in police shootings

by Pets Adviser

One spring morning a few years ago, David Cole* got a frantic call at work from his neighbor.

She described a horrific scene back home — his burglar alarm had been tripped, a police officer had shown up to investigate, and the officer then shot

Cole’s dog multiple times.

PART TWO The neighbor was distraught; she had witnessed the whole thing.

Cole raced home to find his dog lying on the floor in a pool of blood — but still gasping for breath. Cole feverishly started CPR, but sadly this was not enough to save his pet’s life.

How could they do this? Cole thought, growing angry. *My dog was not a monster.*

Actually, pretty far from it. The dog had just undergone a major operation. Up until the day before the shooting, in fact, Cole had been carrying the dog outside every time the dog needed to potty. Cole’s veterinarian says the dog was essentially a quadriplegic around the time of the shooting — he could not have attacked the police officer, much less run toward him. Even worse, bullet wound analysis would later demonstrate that the dog was turned away from the officer firing at him.

In the days that followed, as Cole tried putting the pieces of this tragic puzzle back together — to try to make sense of it all — he heard another disturbing detail from his neighbor. She described overhearing a conversation



between the officer and his partner, who had arrived for backup right after the shooting. The partner asked what had happened, and the officer said, "I was attacked by that pit bull, so I shot it." The partner responded, "That's a Rottweiler, not a pit bull, you idiot."

The entire incident raises quite a few unsettling questions. And that "pit bull" remark brings up one very interesting question in particular:

How big of a role did stereotypes about dog breeds play in the police officer's decision to shoot?

Shootings often a "knee-jerk reaction"

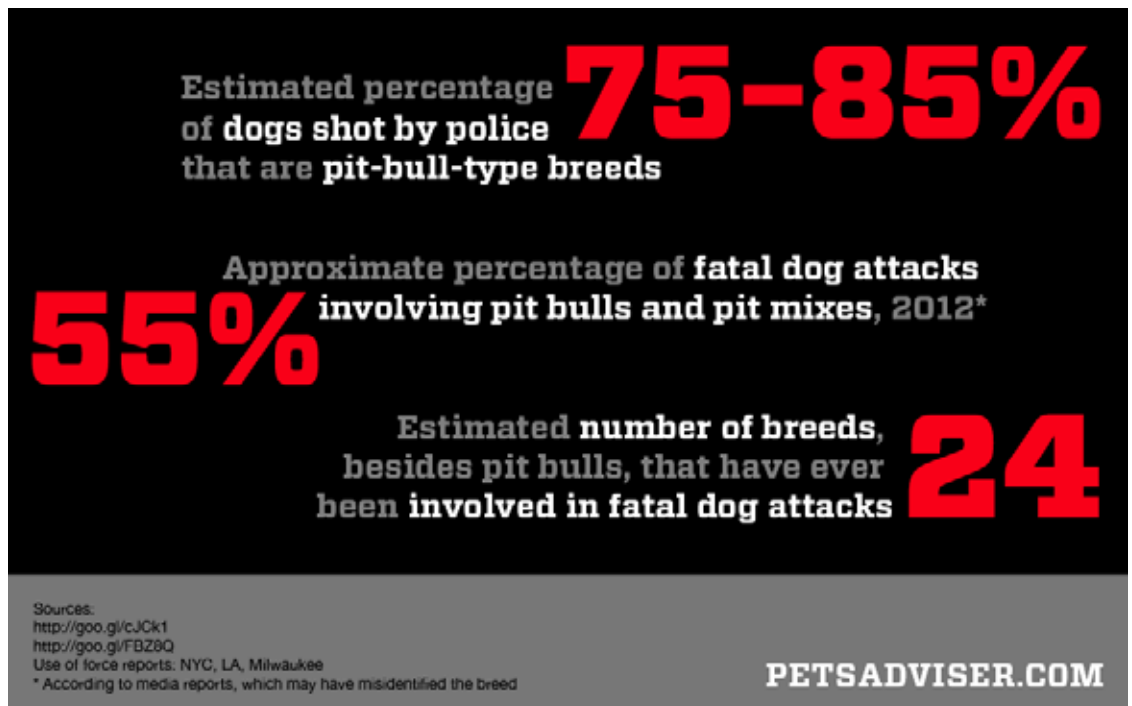
Law enforcement officers do encounter vicious dogs, so it's understandable that they are operating from a heightened state of fear. But there's little excuse for automatically turning to lethal force.

Nearly 40 percent of the homes that police visit have pets, so officers should be prepared to correctly assess whether a dog truly is life-threatening and vicious or simply growling and being protective.

"Our opinion is that often, lethal use of force is not required or justified," Randall Lockwood of the Humane Society of the United States told the *Los Angeles Times*. Lockwood has consulted with police on handling dogs.

"In many cases, a shooting is a knee-jerk reaction by an officer not familiar with dogs," he said. "We have to

*Name, dog breed and other identifying details have been changed to provide anonymity due to a non-monetary settlement reached between the dog's owner and the police department. The actual dog involved in the shooting was a breed commonly listed as an aggressive dog — but most people would agree, it shares little resemblance with a pit bull.



acknowledge that there are situations where they have to shoot a dog, but we feel that's relatively rare."

Presumed guilty

Police officers are put in a position to protect their own safety as well as the safety of others, and they sometimes have very little time to decide if a dog is a threat. Approximately 75 to 85 percent of dogs shot by police are pit bull-type dogs, and it's safe to assume that preconceived notions about breeds play some role.

A Kingsport, Tennessee, police officer who shot and killed a dog in 2009 was overheard remarking, "I hate pit bulls" and that he "didn't like those damn pit bulls anyway," according to three witnesses. The witnesses say the dog was walking up to the officer, wagging his tail.

Even the Justice Department, in its report *The Problem of Dog-Related Incidents and Encounters*, says one of the biggest problems contributing to shootings is:

"Officers who make judgments concerning a dog they encounter based on its presumed breed or physical appearance rather than its behavior."

A reputation, fed by media hype, has been built up in the popular consciousness around pit bulls that portrays them as more likely to attack, more dangerous, ticking time bombs. As a result, they are a primary target of breed-specific legislation (BSL) banning or restricting

them in hundreds of cities and communities. But how deserved is this reputation?

Karen Delise, founder of the National Canine Research Council and an expert on dog bite deaths, says pit bulls are currently the target of a “witch hunt.”

Although it’s true that more “pit bulls” are reported to be involved in attacks than any breed, pit bulls are also exceedingly common dogs. There are more pit bulls in the United States right now than Rottweilers, German shepherds and chows combined — but there are fewer fatal attacks by pit bulls than any of those three breeds once you factor in the attacks as a percentage of the dog population.

“There is no scientific evidence that one kind of dog is more likely to bite or injure a human being than another kind of dog,” explains the Department of Justice in its report, adding that the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) says, “Dog bite statistics are not really statistics, and they do not give an accurate picture of dogs that bite.”

Mislabeling dogs

Many media outlets pile onto the “pit bulls are vicious” bandwagon. For example, vicious dogs in the news are sometimes reported as pit bulls without verification. Understand-A-Bull lists numerous examples of media reports where dogs were incorrectly labeled as pit bulls. Some media outlets updated their articles when the errors were pointed out; others simply removed the photos but left the pit bull mentions.

Not even adoption agencies can get the breed label right. A 2009 study at Western University using canine DNA analysis showed that animal professionals themselves mislabel nearly 88 percent of mixed-breed dogs.

The ideal way to label dogs involved in biting attacks isn’t by breed but by relationship: Was the dog a family pet, or was it merely a resident dog that never enjoyed a positive, compassionate relationship with humans and other dogs? Had the dog been chained up, left in the heat, abused?

Considering how difficult it is to properly identify pit bulls and all the emotionally charged media reports of “pit bulls” involved in attacks, fear is a common reaction to dogs with a block head and large jaws.

Afraid of any dog, period

Of course, another problem exists when officers lack experience with any type of dog. This was made evident

“Vicious” breeds?

Insurance companies keep a list of restricted breeds that will either raise your policy cost or prevent you from obtaining their insurance. Here are some of the most common types of dogs that pop up on these lists:

- Pit bull-type dogs & Staffordshire terriers
- Doberman pinschers
- Rottweilers
- Chows
- Great Danes
- Presa canarios
- Akitas
- Alaskan malamutes
- German shepherds
- Siberian huskies
- Wolf hybrids
- Or a crossbreed of any of the above

in David Cole’s ordeal described above.

In his reply to his partner, the shooting officer revealed that not only did he not know the breed of the dog, but he also chose to use the stereotype of a pit bull to justify his actions.

Forensic reports would later support the neighbor’s observations. The gunshots — nine in all — were fired from some distance while the dog was facing away from the officer in Cole’s fenced-in backyard.

Was the officer afraid of dogs? Had he received any training on how to deal with dogs when performing his duties? Why did he shoot a dog who was facing away from him and later claim to have been attacked?

Cole says he learned that the officer was afraid of dogs, a piece of information he says further supports his own conclusion: “I think police officers need to be desensitized. If you’re someone who’s afraid of animals, you shouldn’t be in a position where you’re going to have a gun and be associated with animals and the public.”

Cole’s story is just one of hundreds of incidents motivating people across the country to demand better training for police officers on effective ways to deal with dogs that they encounter on duty. Our pets are our family members — they’re not disposable property. ■

This article was reported by Kristine Lacoste.
David Deleon Baker contributed.

Retired deputy: Some officers are “jumping off the deep end”

Jim Crosby worked as a police officer in the Jacksonville, Florida, sheriff's office for 23 years and retired as a lieutenant.

He has become an expert on dog behavior, aggression and fatal attacks — and he doesn't mince his words when it comes to police officers who pull the trigger on dogs.

“I'm not the type of person who is typically critical of the police,” Crosby says. “If anything, I'm more likely to be reflexively defensive of them, because I was one for many years. Part of the result of that is that I know the training they get and don't get, and I understand how their world works. So I can kind of look at it from both sides now.”

Recently, Crosby spoke with Sue Davies on her *Ask Sue Show*. The following is an edited partial transcript; it appears here by permission. To listen to the full, original radio show, go here:

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/ask-sue/2013/01/10/ask-sue-show--awareness-of-dogs-being-shot-by-police>

Sue: Has it really just started, or have these shootings been going on for quite a while?

Jim: I'm not sure. I think it's probably a combination of a couple of things. There have always been intersections, if you will, of where police officers and other officials, postmen and UPS people and whatever, come in conflict with dogs. It's always happened; it always will. Some of those cases go better than others.

I know in my career there were a number of occasions where I came potentially in conflict with a dog that wasn't the most friendly in the world. Fortunately, I never used deadly force against any such dog and was never placed in that position. I'm not sure if we've got more of these happening now or if simply people are more sensitive to it because of the publicity that's been around some of the incidents.

The other thing that may be a part of it is that with the Internet and Twitter and Facebook and with the

huge ability to reach out, literally all around the world in just a flash, maybe it's just becoming easier for us to hear about these when they are happening.

I don't know because there really hasn't been a quantification that I'm aware of, of how many per year happened by who and where. I do know if you put “dog shooting police” into Google, it comes up with many, many hits, so those all didn't just happen this year.

Sue: We've had police that may have had an alarm go off, and they are doing the job. They go in and check in the house and they've gone through the back gate to check the back of the property. There's been a dog in the backyard and he's come up to them, and the police are just — I don't know how to put it really, if it's scared or what it is — they are just shooting these dogs.

Now to be fair, I know my dogs; I've got a Rottweiler and I've got two Labrador crosses. If you go to the back gate — yep, they're protecting.

Where does it come to the point that it's a pet and it's protecting and then it's their safety, Jim? Where is this line? Because I think most dogs are protecting their property when they're there, and a lot of these killings happened because of that.

Jim: Yeah. And that's one of those things that we need to really work on. To begin with, I can tell from my own experience having been there as an officer and also talking to police officers, your typical police officer gets no training on how to deal with a difficult animal. I guess it's just assumed that you know it from divine intervention or something. But there's no training given anybody, that I'm aware of — nothing cohesive. Now there are beginning to be little bits of some training, and I'm actually putting some together myself. But in the past there hasn't been, so that's been a tool the officers haven't been given even though they are given extensive training on everything else you can think of.

That said, though, you know dogs are going to be naturally protective of their own property. Yet police officers also have legitimate reasons to go on that property.



So we've got to work on giving the police officers the information they need in a couple of real specific places.

Number 1 is how to perceive a valid threat from a dog. Most dogs — and not all; there's always one that is going to blow the curve, if you will — most dogs, if they feel threatened by you, will run and charge at you. Dogs have a personal space, just like people.

And most of the time, they'll run up and stop three or four feet away to see what you are going to do. Because really, unless there's a screw loose or they've been encouraged otherwise or whatever, they really don't want to get in a fight. They want you to go away because you're something that's frightening them, or worrying them or concerning them, so in their minds they come up and give this aggressive display and then stop to see if you're going to back off. Because if you back off and they can back off, survival-wise the species goes on its merry way and nobody gets hurt.

So one of the things we need to do is to educate officers on how to perceive the distance, that reaction, that behavior. The safest thing to do is if you see something like that, you basically brace yourself and freeze and don't look straight at the dog — but don't turn around

and run, and don't keep coming to it. Both of you are probably going to stop, and then it's very common that you'll be able to slowly back off and go back to the edge.

Now, a police officer has to do his job, but sometimes the level of response to that job has to be different. We know here in the United States that when it comes to sounding alarms in homes, somewhere between 95 and 99 percent of them are bad. Every police officer out there knows that for the most part, most residential alarms are false alarms. It's been set off accidentally, the wind did it, whatever.

So if you pull up to a house where you've been 37 times or maybe you've never been, you see that there's a sign that says, "Beware of Dog," you look and you see a doggy bowl. They have to teach these officers, Okay, let's stop, fellas, and think. Look around.

Yeah, you're going to look to see if there's a burglary happening in progress, and every once in a while there is. But take a second and rattle the fence and go, "Here doggy." Now, if there's a dog, you back up and you say, Okay, can I see the back of the house from the neighbor's yard? Can I make friends with this dog and get into the yard safely? Is the dog just going to stay away from me?

If there has to be a confrontation, instead of going to deadly force first, use pepper spray. Oleo capsicum spray, which police carry, is extremely effective with dogs. I have never seen a dog get sprayed in the face with pepper spray that didn't stop, kind of wrinkle its nose, and look and paw at its face and wind up walking off and usually rubbing its face on the grass and trying to make the stinging go away.

It's non-lethal. It's very effective, and there's no permanent injury involved

— and the police officer can go about his business. The dog will be fine in about 30 to 40 minutes.

So we need to inform the officers on these less-than-lethal alternatives and when that is more reasonable. Again, so when you walk up to the place and you see they have a "Beware of Dog" sign out, you rattle the fence and whatever but nothing happens. When you're going in the fence, you still pull out your spray in one hand and you can have your gun in the other hand just in case there's a real bad human. You're ready and you're prepared and you're mentally ready not to get surprised if the dog is asleep or whatever.

It's just a matter of giving information, training and alternatives. Unfortunately, that's not happening. Too often these people are just going straight for deadly force.

Sue: There was a 15-year-old German shepherd. The police had had a call out; the burglary alarm had gone off. They'd gone through the back gate to check the back of the property. This dog had come up to them, and they shot it. And all it was was a door ajar.

Jim: And the thing is this, how much easier would it have been when that 15-year-old dog came around the corner to just give it a quick squirt with the pepper spray? Or even try looking at it and going, "No! Sit!" or "No! Bad dog!" Sometimes the dog will stop and go, Oh wait a minute.

There's a very clear "matrix of force" that here in the U.S. is taught to police. And it's: We are allowed to

Reported number of shots fired
to take down one 8-month-old puppy
in the middle of a busy neighborhood, 2011 **33**

14 Number, provided by the Department of Justice,
of "commonly available" non-lethal methods
for police to defuse a dog encounter

Approximate percentage of
intentional shootings by police
that involve dogs **50%**

Sources:

<http://www.examiner.com/article/puppy-shot-by-police>
http://cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/e051116358_Dog-Incidents-508.pdf
http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2019809359_rosie02m.html

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use whatever force is reasonably necessary to effect an arrest or to protect ourself or whatever. And that starts with, "Excuse me, Miss Davies. I have a warrant for your arrest. Please place your hands behind your back so I can handcuff you, and we can go down and get this taken care of at the station."

And you go, "Oh, thank you very much, Lt. Crosby. I would be happy to go with you," and we can both go on in a civilized manner — which is how it usually works in Britain. But here in the United States, you wind up with, "Miss Davies, I have to take you under arrest." And then you turn around and swing at me! And then we go through the minimum necessary force, whether it's simply telling you to knock it off, or grabbing you and handcuffing you, or spraying you with a chemical agent, or even using a Taser on you. But there's a lot of real estate between "Hello, Miss Davies, would you come with me?" and Bang, you're dead.

We use that with humans, so we have to give these officers the information to understand that although dogs aren't humans, they are still people's property. They are still people's companions, and let's try using our brains.

We're supposed to be the ones with the big brains — let's try using them and using reasonable levels of force instead of jumping straight off the deep end. ■

Lt. Jim Crosby has written about this issue in depth on his blog, Canine Aggression Issues (canineaggression.blogspot.com).

Police shot and killed my dog — here's what happened next



That's me at a vigil for Kincaid in January in front of the Baltimore PD. Photo by: Matthew Mahlstedt for Pets Adviser

by Stacy Fields

This is the story of my dog's life — and his murder by the police. I first met my dog, Kincaid, in February 2010. This sweet and loving dog was a birthday present from my brother, who got him from a friend. Kincaid was a lover up until the day he was killed.

PART FOUR

My stepfather's own pup had died at an old age, so when Kincaid was about a year old, I asked Ed if he could take Kincaid for a while. I did this for two reasons. First, my stepfather lives alone and he missed having a dog around to keep him company. Second, Kincaid was a strong boy, and with two young

children around, I had found it could be a little much. He loved the kids greatly, but there were times when he didn't know his own strength and would knock them over playing. So Ed took Kincaid into his care. Even though it hurt to let him go that day, I knew we would see him all the time. The kids and I loved him so much, as did the rest of my family. That's how Kincaid came to live with Ed.

Fast-forward to this past New Year's Eve, the start of a tragic turn of events.

I never expected this

I'm a bartender, so I was working into the early hours of the morning on New Year's Day. I got home from work around 6 a.m. and fell right to sleep. I slept right through a number of phone calls and even slept through loud knocking on the door around 11 a.m.

I finally awoke when my mother came in yelling my name. I threw on my robe and went into the living room. I had a sinking feeling. I knew this wasn't going to be good news, but I never expected what she was about to say.

With tears streaming down her face, she told me our sweet Kincaid had been shot by the police. He was dead in an instant. Gone forever. I fell in a heap to the floor, sobbing like a baby.

I learned that a police officer had chased a suspect into the yard, and Ed was reaching down to grab Kincaid's harness as the first shots rang out. Several bullets missed Ed by just a few inches. He says the dog was only barking, not charging. This was such a needless death.

After a while, I pulled myself together long enough to get dressed. Then I drove my truck to Ed's house. (We needed a way to move the dog's body.) When I arrived, all of the police officers on the scene had already left except for one who had to wait for Animal Control to come and release the body.

With unsteady steps and a heavy heart, I walked over to Kincaid's body. The awful sight of blood made me queasy. Crying and petting him, I told him how sorry I was that this had happened to him.

Sadness turns to frustration

After his body was released, we wrapped him in

blankets and had to carry him to the truck bed — one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. We have had dogs pass in their sleep from old age, and we have had to put dogs down because of illnesses, but nothing like this.

I was so sad, I didn't have room in my heart for anger — that came later, when the Baltimore Police Department became so uncooperative that I couldn't even get my rightful copy of the incident report. All I got were excuses, not apologies.

First I was told I could get the report in 10 business days. Then I was told I couldn't get it at all because now the officer felt threatened because of the community's reaction. (I didn't know and still don't know the officer's

name.) Then I was told to call this person, or that person.

That's when I decided I needed to fight back.

My wonderful sister, Crystal Parsons, set up the Facebook page "Kincaid, Killed by Baltimore City Police." I was overwhelmed by the support we got from people all over the world. I knew I couldn't let this moment slip past us. This sparked a fight for justice within me, and I found a strength I didn't know I had.

I contacted every local news channel I could think of. I did TV interviews and radio interviews. If anyone was willing to talk with me, I talked. I contacted an attorney I had been referred to by one of my amazing supporters, and thankfully this attorney was willing to take my case. It's a long process to file suit, but the case is coming along. Justice will prevail. My dog's death will not have been in vain.

I'm fighting hard and daily! I'm fighting not just for Kincaid but for all the family pets taken from us way too early by the police, who are sworn to protect our families. I'm fighting so this doesn't happen anymore and so no one else has to know the pain my family has endured.

Some people ask me: Has the pain eased in the four months that have passed since Kincaid was killed? I wish I could say it has, but honestly it hasn't. And I do not expect that throbbing pain to ever ease.

But we have adopted a puppy from the local shelter to keep Ed company, a late birthday gift — Ed's birthday was only five short days after Kincaid's murder. ■



Little by little, more officers are being trained to deal with dogs

by Pets Adviser

With so many reports of police officers gunning down dogs in recent months, it's hard to understand why law enforcement agencies don't appropriately train their staff in how to deal with animals they encounter in the line of duty.

PART FIVE

Surprisingly few police departments in the United States have offered any notable training for police officers in dealing with dogs. A Pennsylvania patrol officer who is a 12-year police veteran told Pets Adviser that at his department, "We did not receive any special training in the academy.... Our department has no special procedures for dealing with dogs."

This doesn't mean that officials aren't aware that family pets are killed unnecessarily. The federal Department of Justice had its Office of Community Oriented Policing Services distribute a nationwide guide — *The Problem of Dog-Related Incidents and Encounters*. Complete with illustrations of dog postures, this indispensable guide is designed to better inform police officers of the intricacies of human-canine relationships and dog behavior.

Here are two excerpts from the guide:



Baby Girl was running away from officers when she was shot, according to witnesses. Photo: SNARR, used with permission.

"In fact, dogs are seldom dangerous. [Around the same number of] people are killed by lightning each year than by dogs. Despite the increase in the number of dogs and people in the United States, dog bite-related fatalities are exceedingly rare and have not increased over the last two decades."

"Dogs respond to us by communicating through their own body postures, facial expressions, and vocalizations. Without staring at [the dog's face], the officer should look at the entire dog, checking both for behaviors that show the dog is uncomfortable and feeling threatened and for behaviors that signal comfort and friendliness. An officer should look quickly at the whole dog to get an overall impression of the dog's state of mind."

The guide also dispels myths concerning dog aggression, bites and whether certain breeds are more likely to attack than others. Unfortunately, since its publication in 2011, the guide remains unused as standard officer training among most police bureaus in the country.

Where to draw the line and when to draw the gun

There are cases where shooting a dog may be seen

as justified in the line of duty — the dog is charging, truly vicious and doesn't stop short (as most do).

"I have never had to use deadly force against a dog; however, there have been times where I have had my gun drawn because of one," said the Pennsylvania patrol officer, who asked to remain anonymous. "I would use deadly force if my or someone else's life were in imminent danger."

A Bronx police officer with the New York Police Department told Pets Adviser that the NYPD includes some training on how to handle encounters with dogs. He stressed that it's drilled into officers' heads that using lethal force is "always a last resort."

Indeed, a review by Pets Adviser of department guidelines shows they state that firearms should not be discharged at a dog except "when there is no other reasonable means to eliminate the threat." NYPD documents state that "in rapidly evolving situations," alternatives such as batons, OC spray and tranquilizers "are not always prudent or possible."

The NYPD is certainly not immune to police shootings of dogs. Last year, after a pit bull named Star was shot in the head in the middle of a New York City street (caught on video), a petition with nearly 700 signatures was sent to the mayor's office urging better training of NYPD officers.

In a separate incident just last month in a crowded park on Staten Island, two officers fired multiple times on a dog that was apparently running away from them. The dog, Baby Girl, later died after hanging on for a few days. Trisha Ratz, Baby Girl's owner, organized a petition — now with more than 118,000 signatures and counting — urging that the officers be fired and the NYPD institute new policies against the use of deadly force on animals.

**Total amount paid to settle a lawsuit
over three dogs shot by the San Jose police, 2006**

\$1,800,000

**Cost, per officer, of an eight-hour
training session on non-lethal ways to deal with dogs**

\$100

Sources:
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"Baby Girl was a good girl. She never did and never would hurt any human or any pet," Ratz told Pets Adviser. Police officers such as those who killed her dog "need to be stopped from shooting first and then questioning after," she said.

They "will be held accountable," said Robin Menard of SNARR (Special Needs Animal Rescue Rehabilitation), the group that had adopted out Baby Girl.

A small start could make a huge difference

The good news: In the past year or so, a handful of police departments in the United States have responded to public scrutiny and criticism of the apparent "shoot first" mentality when a dog approaches an officer. The progress is incremental, but more police officers across the nation are beginning to get the training they deserve.

For example, after the shooting death of a family's pet dog during a routine traffic stop in 2003, the state of Tennessee passed a law known as the General Patton Act, which mandates training in understanding animal behavior. Not only do measures like this help protect dogs and cops from potentially dangerous situations, but they also demonstrate that the police are taking their community into consideration.

More recently, the police department of Arlington, Texas, instituted a training program that includes videos,

classroom instruction by the department's K-9 unit and a written test, all concerning animal handling. The mandatory training for officers follows the senseless death of Bucky, a therapeutic pet who was shot five times as the family's children watched in horror.

While nearly every police department in the country refuses to admit there's any problem with unjustified police shootings of dogs, Sgt. Christopher Cook of the Arlington Police Department's media office made some rather remarkable statements during a news conference announcing the training. He said the new program will "better equip our workforce with options in dealing with animals *rather than always resorting to deadly force*." He added, "While there are some isolated incidents where aggressive dogs that are not restrained do attack officers or citizens, *we believe that it's not the norm*."

The police department in Fort Worth has also started training its officers for dog-handling scenarios. Mark and Cindy Boling have had a lot to do with this: They started advocating heavily for the police training after their border collie Lily was shot to death by a police officer investigating a theft — at the wrong residence.

"[The officer] wasn't thinking," Cindy Boling told the *Fort Worth Weekly*. "If he would have had training, he would have been thinking." She has said Lily was simply running up to greet the officer.

At the Bolings' request, the Fort Worth Police Department now requires officers to attend an eight-hour course in which they learn proper techniques in dealing with dogs, placing much emphasis on using lethal force only as a last resort. The course insists that officers can defend themselves with a police baton, "clipboard, flare... whatever," says Jim Osorio, who leads the training. "And trying not to show fear... that's the biggest thing."

The Bolings continue to push for more training and encourage others to create similar changes in their city and state legislatures. "There are many of us mourning a loss of a [dog] under similar circumstances," Cindy Boling wrote on Facebook.

Groundbreaking law

Just last month, the state legislature in Colorado passed SB226, also called the Dog Protection Act, in response to dog shootings, civil litigation, protests and public demand. One of those shootings involved a mixed-breed therapy dog named Chloe. Chloe was caught on a catchpole, hit with a taser and shot five times. A video

showed the dog merely trying to get away — not lunging or biting as was suggested.

Chloe is but one of many names — each as individually important as the next — that are reason to push for state-mandated training of officers in canine behavior. Colorado's new law (awaiting the governor's signature on Monday, May 13) does exactly that, requiring that programs designed by veterinarians or animal behaviorists be taken by law enforcement officers to identify dog behaviors, become accustomed to alternatives to lethal force, work with animal control officers, and allow opportunities for pet owners to intervene and gain control of their dogs as the need arises.

Colorado's groundbreaking Dog Protection Act is the first legislation of its kind to set forth required canine behavior training to law enforcement officers. That's great news not only for Colorado pet owners but for pet owners across the country, who are hoping its passage will contribute to laws enacted in their own states.

Change starts with you. As Cindy Boling says, "Do something." While civil litigation and large fines to police departments may be causing a lot more people to stand up and take a second look at this issue, the public needs to express its concern as well. Contact your local and state legislators. Respectfully explain the importance of this issue to you as a dog owner. Ask what their position is on required canine behavior training for police officers — and urge them to follow Colorado's example to reduce the danger to our dogs.

One last request: Walk over right now and give your pet a great big hug. Life is precious — savor the moments you share together. ■

This article was reported by Jenna Rohrbacher with contributions by Kristine Lacoste, David Deleon Baker and Sarah Blakemore.

Pets Adviser would like to give special thanks to:

Cindy Boling, Kristin L. Hoffman, Stacy Fields, Natalie Yandle, Rita Hairston, Barbara Hinsz, Cathy Thomas, Trisha Ratz, Denise Lachance, Sue Davies and Scott Heiser for their help. We dedicate this report in memory of the pets whose lives have been lost.

You can print out and distribute this report freely; however, you may not sell it or republish it on your site. Our hope is that our free report will be shared widely to raise awareness and build greater momentum for change.

Pets Adviser Readers Respond

Here's a selection of edited comments about our five-part series "Gunned Down."

I'm certainly glad to see this coverage of what I think is an epidemic of shootings. We certainly did not know how frequently dogs are being shot by law enforcement until our Lily was shot to death a year ago this month. I hate that we were not aware — it probably would have saved our baby's life. We never imagined — ever — that when we saw the officer walking up our driveway we had something to fear, that our lives would be changed forever. And in the spirit of being unbiased, we don't think the officer expected his life to be changed on that day. We don't think he went home and high-fived the events of the day. He was one of the first to sign up for the mandatory training in Fort Worth. We believe that if he had the training on May 26, 2012, our baby would still be alive. In closing, let me say: More people need to *do something* about this problem. I've found that the majority of folks just want to talk about it and let others do.

—Cindy Boling

Anyone who is afraid of dogs needs to be desensitized before being given a gun and set loose among the dog-owning public; otherwise it is a recipe for disaster. In a "previous life," I sold real estate. Many homes had dogs, who were unclear why strange people kept coming to the home when their humans were not there. Many would meet me at the gate barking a warning. I would tell them they were doing a good job guarding and encourage them to accompany me to the door. I was never bitten. In the field next to the parking lot for the office, there was a doberman tied out, who was clearly a guard dog for the warehouse next door. Knowing that dogs usually hate being alone, I began to approach him. He was thrilled for the company, and after I ascertained that he was completely friendly, all the dog people in the office would go and greet the dog when we went to to our cars.

—Jane Eagle

Cops are just people — and some people are stupid cowards. If these cops are so intimidated by a dog, obviously they are in the wrong line of work. I would hate to think my life is in the hands of someone who thinks every dog is attacking them. By the

way, who thinks *anyone* was at "fault" in the cases cited, other than the cops? In none of the cases cited were the owners doing anything that could possibly be regarded as irresponsible.

—Val Stein

I fully understand the police shooting an attacking dog. That being said, I've seen reports of officers arbitrarily firing into a random dog, just because it is barking and he can claim he felt threatened. Now I would *never* claim that all officers are like that, but there are a number of them out there for whom policy reform needs to be made.

—Jon Spencer

This is pathetic. A police officer has a job, and that's to enforce the law. Sometimes animals are killed that shouldn't have been, and sometimes firing on a dog is the appropriate action. But what is so frustrating is the sheer number of people who think they have any right to judge someone who puts himself in high-tension and dangerous situations daily. If a large and aggressive dog was charging you, do you honestly believe you would be thinking with extreme clarity? It is an officer's job to neutralize dangerous situations and do what all these people who criticize them will not stick their own necks out to do. People who work in tense situations will not always take the most perfect of actions, but you come back to me when have been forced to choose between shooting an animal or risking your life — and thereby risking the lives of countless others — in a matter of seconds. Don't misunderstand me, I'm no police wannabe. They certainly do have the same percentage of all those things, but that's exactly it, isn't it? So many people generalize the authorities because of a few individuals. People want someone to blame and to hate, and it's easy to blame the people in charge, especially when *some* of them have done bad things.

—Matty Robbins

Pets Adviser and readers respond to Matty Robbins:

We appreciate and are humbled that officers and emergency responders put their lives on the line every day for the public's safety. However, you would be astonished at some of these cases. Many have nothing to do with "a

large and aggressive dog...charging." Some dogs are on leashes, or tied up, or running away, or hiding.

—*Pets Adviser*

All well and good Matty, and most of us would give the police the benefit of the doubt when it is claimed that a dog was attacking. What undermines that benefit of the doubt is the vast number of cases where all the evidence, including video in many cases, clearly demonstrates the shooting was totally unnecessary, yet the shootings are still ruled "justified." Dogs are family to many of us, not just property — and shooting a dog without needing to do so is an assault on peoples' families. —*Stuart Harrison*

You need to read reports of what is happening out there, Matty. Most of the time your scenario is not what is happening. Dogs are killed for barking; they're shot in the back while running away; killed on catchpoles; shot while chained; killed in their own yards while the cops are outside the yard; killed while their owner is right beside them; killed while the cop is yelling for the owner to grab them as their owner is doing just that; shot because of breed; do I need to go on? Do some research.

—*Sharon Cooper*

As an owner of a pit bull killed by state troopers this year, I have to chime in. I don't hate cops; I don't hate authority. What I hate is excessive force. I hate for someone to be able to cover their tracks because of their "authority." I have many friends in and retired from law enforcement because of my work. There are great ones out there who serve the community — and then there are ones who apparently got bullied in school and now are taking it out on society. What I want is for the latter to be held accountable. Our pets are family. Let's get Colorado's legislation passed everywhere! I'm going into extreme debt to push our family's case to help make noise so that Pennsylvania will eventually pass the same.

—*Bryan Hartman*

I was within a split second of finding my two large dogs, who had strayed, surrounded by cops getting ready to shoot them outside a senior retirement home. When I roared up in my car hollering, "Stop! Those are my dogs!" the cops looked like they'd just been caught about to do something wrong. And while they were distracted, I called my two dogs who raced to my car. Then the cops recovered and started up with

the guilt-trip lectures: "You know how much trouble you would have been in if their barking had caused a heart attack of one of the seniors?" I thought, And you firing your gun off in the middle of the night right next to the building — that wouldn't be a problem? But knowing better, I listened till they ran out of steam, and then I asked, "Can I go now?" — to which they literally sneered at me and said, "Yeah, you can go." As I was leaving, a lady waved me over. She told me she had both of my dogs under control, holding onto their collars looking at their dog tags for info, when the security guard for the facility came up banging a wood baton on his police flashlight hollering, "Get out of here!" My dogs started barking at him. The lady said the guard must have called the cops before this because right then the cops showed up. And between the guard and five cops, they had backed my dogs up against the building wall getting ready to execute them — until I roared up on the scene. Oh, and the reason my dogs got out: A pizza delivery dude had left my gate open.

—*Joe McLeod*

I think most of the dog killing by the police has been unnecessary and unwarranted. Suggestion (I've used this technique before) if an officer sees a dog that may look a little threatening: They should put up their hand, signaling stop — and say STOP or HEY, just to get the dog's attention. Nine times out of 10, the animal will lose his focus and stop, wondering what is going on. It could save the dog's life! In the long run, these officers need to be trained properly not to shoot first and ask questions later. Another safe way (for both police and dog) is if the officer is called, stay in the car, check out the situation, maybe even call the dog over to see if he is friendly. Most are!

—*A. Baker*

Delivery people and mail carriers deal with barking dogs every day and don't need to shoot them.

—*Mary L. Flath Cairns*

Now we want to hear from you.

The conversation isn't over. In fact, it's just beginning. To leave your own comment, visit the complete series online:

<http://www.petsadviser.com/gunned-down/>

Scroll down to find the comments beneath the article.

Some precautions and advice for protecting your dog

by Kristine Lacoste

The idea of your dog being shot is a scary possibility. There are precautions you can take to protect your dog when out in public or when at home and encountering the police.

1. The best assumptions to make: none. Even if your dog is always friendly, you think the responding officer looks nice or might have dogs, your dog never runs up to anyone or any other scenario you see playing out in your head, remember one thing — anything can happen. There are countless examples of dogs being shot while on a restraint, being walked on the street or in their own backyard who did nothing more than bark and get shot, so no measure of precaution is wasted.

2. Secure outdoor areas to which your dog has access. Pay special attention to broken gate latches, holes at the bottom of fences, missing boards or any other means of escape from your yard or contained area your dog might be in. Don't let your dogs run the neighborhood or large outdoor areas where they might escape or come in contact with the public.

3. Make your dog's presence known. Signs displaying "Beware of Dog" or "A Dog Lives Here" tell someone there is a dog on the property. Consider using multiple signs on the front of your property, gate entrances and even inside your backyard or near the back door. Refrain from using signs that might encourage intruders, such as "Friendly old dog, will not bite."

4. If you know the police are coming to your house, secure your dog inside the home, preferably in a closed and secure room. Inform the responding officers that

you have a dog and he/she is located in ____ room. You might also have a crate to use, and make sure the closure is secure. If you assume the officers won't come inside the home or your dog will stay when told, refer to #1 on this list.

5. If police arrive unexpectedly to your home or neighborhood, make sure your dog is inside the home and secured. If it appears they are coming to your address, follow the steps in #4.

6. If you encounter an officer unexpectedly, announce that you are going to put your dog away. If you are out in public, leash your dog (if not already leashed) and try to keep the dog next to or behind you while keeping a distance from the officer. Tell the officer your dog's name and state that you have your dog under control. If you don't have a leash, squat down and hold your dog firmly while stating the above.

7. Always keep your dog leashed in public when possible. Keep an extra leash at home and in your vehicles.

8. Never leave your dog unattended or under the supervision of children.

9. If your dog responds to strangers by barking, appears aggressive or is a breed reported to be aggressive, consider adding a piece of material, vest or flag to your dog or the leash that states the animal is friendly, asks people to keep a distance or identifies your dog as a service animal. While these steps may not prevent injury to your dog, it draws the attention of someone meeting your dog for the first time to read the words and not immediately judge the animal. ■

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