

Ending dog attacks

Thursday, August 10, 2006

Vicious dog attacks in a pair of Southland communities this summer have led to one injured teen and two dead pets.

Victims of the attacks in Richton Park and Chicago Heights have asked their public officials for help. Fears and frustration have been raised as those officials have acted to get the dogs off the street.

We'll say this right off: vicious dogs have no place in our suburban towns. Anyone who has a dog from a notoriously aggressive breed — pit bulls come to mind first — must make sure their animals are carefully trained and are generally kept away from strangers, especially small children, and other pets. Otherwise they must be prepared to face sometimes drastic consequences.

In Richton Park, a 13-year-old was bitten by a pit bull July 7. On July 4, a resident's kitten was killed by a pit bull. In both cases, the dogs were running loose. By the end of last month, Richton Park had impounded four pit bulls. One was destroyed and two others were awaiting destruction; the fourth was ordered released to Indiana.

In Chicago Heights, a pit bull attacked and killed a Yorkshire terrier. Unlike Richton Park, the city doesn't have a vicious dog ordinance; as a result, it can only impound an animal on a temporary basis. The city cannot, at this time, order the destruction of a vicious animal.

Chicago Heights officials are reportedly looking at ways to tighten up the city's animal control ordinance to better protect residents and their pets. It makes sense for all our towns to bolster its own laws and ensure that all pet owners understand their responsibilities as well.

Nobody wants to take away — or destroy — someone else's pet. Government shouldn't stick its snout into the business of owners choosing pets. However, government is charged with protecting the health and welfare of the public, and this domain extends to doing everything necessary to prevent attacks by dogs that, unfortunately, may have been trained to go on the attack.