

Curbing vicious dogs

October 12, 2006

On Oct. 2, Chicago Heights city council members unanimously approved an ordinance designed to protect the community from vicious dogs.

A day later, the ordinance was put to its first test after a 100-pound pit bull broke loose from a chain and attacked a postal worker in the 400 block of West 14th Place.

What happened after that shows that Chicago Heights did the right thing by adopting new rules to prevent such attacks — and to make sure that there are repercussions if they do occur.

The postal worker was scratched but managed to avoid being bit by placing her mail bag between herself and the dog. When police and paramedics arrived, the dog continued to display aggressive behavior; it was ultimately shot to death.

A second dog was chained to the fence. It crushed two metal poles used by police in attempts to safely remove the animal. It took two tranquilizer darts to calm the dog down so that it could be taken to an animal hospital.

Under the new ordinance, the owner of the dogs is subject to fines. She must also take several steps before the second dog can be returned to her. The dog will be required to have a microchip containing information embedded into it. It will have to be spayed or neutered. The owner will have to erect a 60-foot fence and post a sign identifying the dog as dangerous. Once returned, the dog can be taken out in public only when muzzled and on a 4-foot leash.

Under the ordinance, a dog owner can also required to enter the dog into a socialization or behavior program.

As we've said before, it's unfortunate that communities have to turn to such extreme steps to keep residents safe from vicious dogs.

But we've seen an increase in dog attacks from breeds — like pit bulls — that are popular, seemingly because of their vicious reputation. Humans, however, are at fault for encouraging that viciousness.

When that happens, public officials have an obligation to keep the community safe from dogs that attack.