

Dog fight ; Alderman proposes pit bull ban, but critics question if it will work:

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CHICAGO

Pit bulls, a breed involved in highly publicized and particularly vicious attacks on people and other animals, eventually would be outlawed in Chicago under a controversial proposal introduced Wednesday.

Pit bulls owned currently by city residents would be able to stay- -if their masters comply with a list of required safeguards--but no additional pit bulls could be purchased legally or owned within the city limits.

The city also would crack down on other "dangerous animals," including individual dogs of any breed that have injured a person or other animal without provocation.

Critics question the effectiveness of breed-specific bans, saying laws should target dangerous behavior instead.

"We see no fact that it works," said John Snyder, director of companion animals at the Humane Society of the United States. Effective legislation, he said, "puts the point of pressure on the deed, not the breed."

The measure was introduced by Ald. Virginia Rugai (19th), who has crusaded against dangerous dogs after a pack of pit bulls attacked and killed one woman and seriously injured another in 2003 in Dan Ryan Woods, which is partly in Rugai's Southwest Side ward.

A pit bull attack on two children recently near northwest suburban Cary provides another example of the need for the ban, Rugai asserted. Even pit bulls that are family pets with no history of violence, such as those in the Cary attack, can go berserk in an instant, she said.

"Why they snap I don't know. This is a unique breed. There is none like it."

Early support appeared to be shaping up for the tough measure.

"How many people have to be maimed?" asked Ald. Isaac Carothers (29th). "How many people have to be killed by these vicious dogs before we take action?"

Though he stopped short of an endorsement, Mayor Daley sounded a similar note.

"I think they have to look at [a ban] very carefully," Daley said. "People have responsibilities for dogs. And if a pit bull is off leash, you'd better jump on a car. You'd better get out of the way."

One Chicago owner said he thinks the proposed legislation unfairly paints all pit bulls with the same brush. Paul DiPego, 38, has owned an American pit bull terrier for about four years. Diesel is submissive, friendly to people and has never shown any aggression that he knows of, DiPego said.

"A dog's a dog, whether it's a pit bull, Rotweiller, German shepherd," said Yessenia Carreon, 23, whose family

always has owned pit bulls. "Any dog can attack. It just depends on how they're raised."

But a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Veterinary Medical Association, which tracked 238 fatal dog attacks on humans between 1979 and 1998, raised concerns about pit bull-type dogs. The research found that the breed was involved in about one-third of the attacks.

ANIMAL CONTROL

Under the proposal, pit bulls currently in the city would be required to get microchip implants. In addition to providing information that identifies them, the chips would allow authorities to tell them from "illegal" dogs in the city after the ban takes effect.

Pit bulls also would be required to be sterilized and have a "dangerous animal" license that would help the city keep track of where they are. Besides being required to provide pens when their pit pulls are kept outside, owners also would have to erect fences on the perimeters of their property and put up warning signs.

Similar provisions are proposed for individual animals deemed dangerous.

No owner would be allowed to have more than two dangerous animals in one household.

Violators of the measure would face fines of up to \$1,000, up to six months in jail and impoundment of their animals.

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