

Pit bull owners have special obligation to control pets

Web-posted Apr 27, 2007

EDITORIAL

Although we know we'll be invoking the wrath of some dog lovers, particularly pit bull owners, we must wholeheartedly support the action of a police officer in the recent shooting of a Holly family's pet pit bull.

Certainly, there was an emotional tie between the animal and the family, especially the children, and we extend our sympathies for their loss.

But in analyzing the circumstances surrounding the shooting, it appears the officer had little choice - he just couldn't take a chance, considering the breed's track record.

According to reports, the dog ran out of the family home when a door was inadvertently left open.

The stocky, light-brown pit bull, weighing between 70 and 80 pounds, approached a man living nearby.

Understandably, the man became fearful and called police.

Holly Police Chief Rollie Gackstetter said the dog began circling a police officer dispatched to the home.

The officer reportedly sprayed a chemical eye-and-nose irritant at the dog at least twice, but

without much effect on the animal.

As Gackstetter said, "At that point the dog charged him in the back yard. É The officer had said he was backed up against the house and the deck area."

The police officer then fired three shots at the dog before it ran off and later died.

Gackstetter said the officer acted in accordance with department policies.

It's doubtful that anyone, police officer or not, would not have become concerned and taken whatever defensive measures deemed necessary to fend off the dog.

Complicating the situation, in that neighborhood at least, is the fact that a pit bull matching the description of the one shot was wandering loose.

It's understandable that neighbors would be concerned.

While any dog can turn hostile, depending upon how it is treated and circumstances at the moment, the number of documented pit bull attacks is substantially higher than for any other breed of dog.

It's obvious that, while not all pit bulls are dangerous, the staggering number of attacks involving pit bulls indicates there must be something in that breed's genetics that makes it more volatile than other types of dogs.

Consequently, if people are going to own a pit bull - for the safety of their pet, if nothing less - they probably should take special precautions to make sure the animal doesn't accidentally get out of the house or yard.

These can involve any number of measures, such as making sure all doors are not only properly closed but also locked to keep the dog in the house.

Outside, invisible fences seem to work for many dogs.

Other alternatives might be keeping the dog in a pen or using an extra strong chain and keeping it tied to a post cemented securely in the ground.

After almost every pit bull attack, the owner claims the dog was really quite friendly and docile - and that the action was "unlike the pet."

But the excuse that the dog got out by accident and really wasn't dangerous pales in the face of the serious injuries and sometimes deaths caused by rampaging pit bulls.