

# Dog Bite Deterrence for Field Workers

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# Learning Objectives

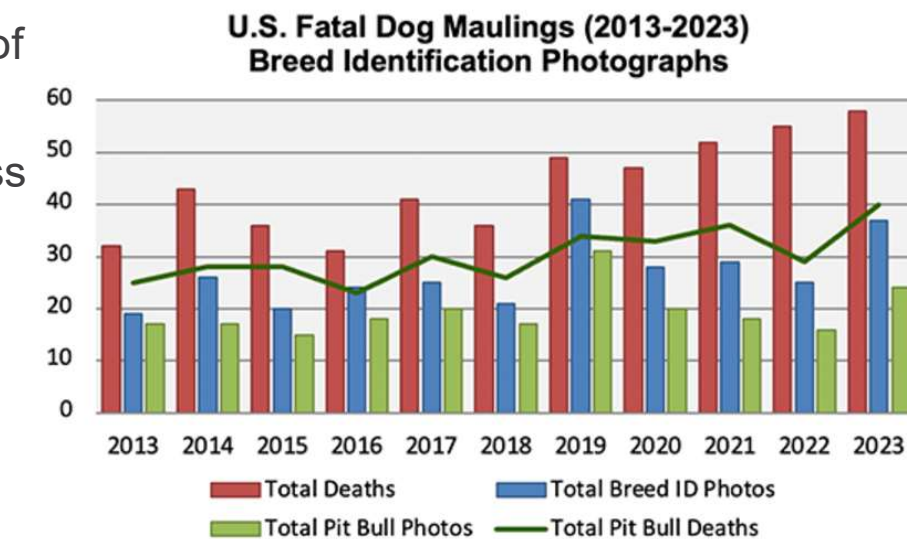


- Understand the frequency of dog attacks and possible dangers to utility workers.
- Review elements of situational awareness as it relates to utility worker safety.
- Understand indicators of the presence of dogs at a customer's home.
- Identify possible reasons for aggression in dogs.
- Explain approaches and interactions with dogs in various settings.
- Describe and implement preventive and defensive actions against attacks.
- Understand tools that may enhance field worker safety.

# Dog Attacks



- About 54% of US Households own at least one dog (according to ASPCA).
- 19,000 total reported claims related to dog bites in 2023.
- 72 Deaths by dog attack in the US in 2023.
- Portland, Oregon is ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in nation for dog bites of mail carriers.
- NW Natural had 4 dog attacks, previously averaged less than 2 per year.



Source: DogsBite.org (January 2024)

# Dog Attack Cases



- Employee was walking with a customer to the garage and customer's dog ran up and bit them in the left knee, biting thru pant leg, punctured skin in two places causing bleeding and bruising.
- Employee was in the side yard of a new customers property and was digging a riser hole to install a new service. The male son at the home let the dogs out into the side yard where the employee was working, and the dogs immediately came after the employee. Employee backed into a corner before the first dog bit him then backed off. The second dog continued to try and bite the employee until he was able to fend off the dog with a shovel.
- Employee needed to verify location of furnace. Was told by customer that their dog was confined. Employee entered structure and Pitbull Terrier came down hallway and attacked employee. Employee retreated outside pursued by dog. Employee tripped over debris in front yard and was bit on left leg behind knee. Employee was able to fight off dog and return to safety of their van.



# The Good News



## 1. 1 in 118,776 Odds of Dying from a Dog Bite

### 1 in 118,776 Odds of Dying from a Dog Attack

You're more likely to die from a fall or choking than from a dog attack.

Lightning storms, flying on an airplane and riding on a passenger train all have some of the lowest risks of death.



| Cause of Death           | Odds of Dying        |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Heart disease            | 1 in 6               |
| Fall                     | 1 in 111             |
| Dog attack               | 1 in 118,776         |
| Lightning                | 1 in 180,746         |
| Railway passenger        | Too few to calculate |
| Passenger on an airplane | Too few to calculate |



The odds of dying from a dog attack in the United States are more likely than from a lightning strike or flying on an airplane. You're more likely to die from a **car accident**, choking, an accidental firearm discharge, or, surprisingly, a hornet, wasp, or bee sting. (1)

\*MPK Law Group, Los Angeles, CA November 2024

## Some reasons a dog may attack/bite.



- **Fear-based aggression:** When a dog feels scared or threatened by a person or situation.
- **Pack Animals:** Dogs are instinctively predatory and protective of their territory.
- **Possessive aggression:** Protecting food, toys, or humans (loyalty).
- **Pain-induced aggression:** Biting due to discomfort from an injury or illness.
- **Frustration aggression:** When a dog is unable to get what they want and lashes out.
- **Redirected aggression:** Displacing aggression onto someone or something else when feeling overwhelmed.
- **Play aggression:** Overly rough play that escalates to biting.
- **Lack of socialization:** Not being properly exposed to different people and situations as a puppy.



## Review – Situational Awareness



- Observe
- Recognize
- Assess
- De-escalate
- Report
- Remember- what is your goal?



*“To achieve an assigned task and provide great customer service.”*

# Observe – Situational Awareness

- Situational Awareness is your first line of defense against danger – it helps you avoid problems before you encounter them.
- Be vigilant of your surroundings - Know where you are.
- Display appropriate credentials and company attire, professional appearance.
- Scene size-up – previous history at location or with customer(s).
- **Don't surprise the customer – communicate your intent\***
- Remember – you don't know what was happening 15 minutes prior.
- Visually check for potential hazards
  - Dogs or other animals on the property (ask them to secure).
  - Loitering group on premises or possible drug activity
  - Obvious weapons or items which can be used as such
  - Person(s) under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or possible mental health issues.
  - Other possible threats.





## Situational Awareness - Customer Contact



- Upon customer contact there is instant non-verbal communication (majority of communication).
- Customer may be observing you from the moment you arrive.
- The presence of a crew or even a single employee can be intimidating for a customer.
- Look for any possible indicators of things that may be hazards to you or your team.



# Non-verbal communication



- Maintain a distance of at least 1 ½ body lengths between yourself and the aggressive person
- Use reassuring body language – hands in non-threatening but ready position – palms up, palms down
- Avoid unnecessary hand movement or gestures
- Relax your posture and maintain a non-aggressive physical presence
- Continual non-challenging eye contact
- Project confidence with a patient attitude and demeanor
- Manage your breathing – in 4 out 4
- Have an escape plan or exit strategy

# Safety



- If any intimidating, threatening language or actions occur, immediately leave the situation and report.
- If the person is exhibiting behaviors of drug use, alcohol use, or unstable mental disposition, leave immediately and report.
- If a customer encourages an animal, such as dog, to attack or block an employee's entrance to property, immediately leave the premises and report.
- Where there is a known potential for conflict to occur, never act alone.
- Always follow the organizations security approach.
- If at any time there is a legitimate threat of violence, seek safety and call 9-1-1.

# Ways to Depart



- Ask to be excused to get something from your vehicle.
- Pretend you need to make a phone call.
- Calmly explain you need to depart the premises.
- In extreme circumstances – **just leave**. You may need to abandon tools, equipment, or your vehicle.

# Report



- Report all incidents of customer escalation regardless of severity to **supervisor and/or Corporate Security.**
- Ensure address is flagged based on behavior observed.
- Reporting is critical for mitigating potentially violent situations in the future
- Reporting lends to a culture of shared responsibility
- Description of situation
- Intended target(s)
- Threatening words or actions
- Relevant background information

# SCENARIO #1



You are sent to complete a gas furnace light at a new customer residence.

Upon arriving at the location, you notice a fence around the property.

What are other signs that a dog may live at this site?

- “Beware of Dog” sign
- Food/Water dish
- Yellow stains on grass
- Dog toys or chain
- Dog door into home
- Doghouse
- Animal feces



You notice a water dish on the porch of the residence.

What can you do to help determine if the residents have a dog?

- Whistle/snap fingers
- Rattle fence or gate
- Make other noises that would alert a dog and homeowner of your presence.



You whistle, but no dog appears.

Is it safe to enter the fence to ring the doorbell?

- Use caution
- Enter slowly
- Look for dogs lurking under stairs, in bushes, inside garages or sheds with partially open doors.
- Should you consider rescheduling?

You approach the door and ring the doorbell. You hear a dog barking inside.

The customer opens the door. What do you do now?

- If possible, brace screen door with your foot
- Greet the customer
- Let them know what work you're doing
- Ask them to put the dog away
- Ask them to double check if they advise the dog is secured

You ask the customer politely to put the dog away.

The customer says, “oh, but she’s friendly—she won’t bite you, I promise.”

What do you do?

- Advise them of your **company policy?**
- Advise you won’t be able to do the work with a dog loose

The customer cooperates and puts the dog away in another room.

What could you have done if the customer refused?

- Decline the work
- Notify a supervisor
- Add to premise notes for next tech or crew



After you are finished you are exiting the residence and hear a dog barking near you.

A dog approaches you, lies down and shows its belly to you.

Should you pet it?

- If customer is home, ask the owner to put the dog away.
- Do not pet the dog.
- This could be a sign of submission.
- A submissive dog may bite.

You are done with your work and return to your vehicle.

What should you do next?

- Enter premise notes about the customer having a dog

# SCENARIO #2

You are doing meter maintenance in a backyard. There were no signs of dogs when you arrived, and the customer wasn't home.

The customer returns with two dogs and unleashes them into the backyard.

What are the chances of being bit?

- High level of risk of being bit by dogs who are surprised, in a pack, and with the owner present.

The dogs see you and start running towards you.

What should you do?

- Stand up and face the dogs
- Move backwards towards a fence or wall
- Shout commands using a loud stern voice
- Try to grab something to keep between you and the dogs

One dog turns away when its owner calls for it, but the other lunges at you.

What should you do?

- Try to put something between you and the dog
- Defend yourself by hitting its paws, neck, eyes, or belly
- Try to find an escape route
- Spray “Seamtest” directed at dog’s face



You are able to exit the backyard without being bitten.

The customer puts the dogs away and apologizes for the incident. You are able to complete your work.

What should you do once you return to your van?

- Document the near miss incident and make appropriate notifications.
- Leave premise notes

# SCENARIO #3

You are turning on a gas stove in an apartment. You enter the home and notice a toddler playing in the living room.

As you enter the living room, you notice a quiet, attentive dog staring at you.

Is this dog a bite risk?

- High bite risk from quiet, attentive dog, especially when children are present

What should you do?

- Slowly back towards a wall
- Call for the customer
- Ask the customer to put the dog away, explain company policy

The customer is putting the dog in another room, but it escapes.

The dog quickly lunges at you and bites your forearm, puncturing your skin.

The customer is able to control and secure the dog.

What should you do?

- Apply first aid
- Ask customer about vaccine records
- Get medical attention or consultation
- Notify supervisor immediately
- Submit incident report
- Add to premise notes
- Add alert to account

# Defend Yourself –worst case scenario



- The safest move is to avoid the encounter if possible – take another path.
- Dogs may view eye contact as a threat.
- Avoid smiling as an aggressive dog may mistake this as you showing your teeth.
- Never underestimate a dog – irrespective of its size, age, looks, etc. A dog is a dog.
- If you see a dog approaching in an aggressive manner – it's likely coming for an attack.
- Put something between you and the dog if possible.
- Be calm, act fast, AVOID RUNNING unless you KNOW you can get away (sees you as prey).
- Use words like “DOWN”, “NO”, “GO BACK” in a stern and commanding voice.
- Consider folding your arms to protect fingers and hands or place clenched fists near your face or head. Consider rolling into a “fetal position” if you are knocked to the ground.



# Additional Considerations



National Dog Bite Prevention Week – Second full week of April

Online resources and training – US Postal Service

Post tips for dog owners on company web site

Assume you are likely on camera when working at customers homes.



# Tools for Deterrence



Northwest Natural Safety has assessed the effectiveness and practicality of several tools for field workers as they pertain to the needs of our company.

The representation of products in the following slides is for demonstrative purposes only and should not be considered an endorsement or testimonial for any particular product or option.



# Sonic Emitter



- No lasting effects to dog
- 50' range aim and push button
- Requires charging
- 10% of dogs not impacted
- Not easily carried
- NWN Trial: Effective on younger dogs but not older ones. Only worked on 50% of the dogs we trialed. Unsure if it will repel aggressive dogs.



# Air Horn



- At least 50' range, 110-120db
- Conveniently carried on person
- Minimal maintenance – check pressure
- May cause harm to animal at close range, may cause harm to person deploying
- NWN Trial – 122 dB at person, 111 at 10', 95.5 at 20 ft. Exceeds OSHA permissible noise exposure levels if not wearing hearing protection devices
- Cannister also gets extremely cold and can cause freezing to hands.

# Dog Spray Neem Oil



- No Medical Harm – Neem oil (repellent)
- 10' range aim and push button
- Minimal maintenance
- Conveniently carried
- NWN Trial – After further review, Is flammable and safety hazard for technicians working near open flame. Can cause respiratory problems if inhaled.



# Dog Spray – pepper spray



- No Permanent physical harm to animal
- 12' range – aerosol
- Minimal maintenance – blend contents and propellant
- Can be easily carried
- Cross contamination issues – spray versus gel
- NW Natural currently evaluation



# Dog Spray - Citronella



- No Physical harm
- 10' range, aerosol
- Minimal maintenance – propellant
- Can be easily carried
- NW Natural currently evaluation



# Dog Shielding Devices



Defensive tools used to put an object between the worker and an attacking dog.

These tools can be used to:

- *Keep dogs at bay*
- *Open gates*
- *Move brush out of the way*





# Questions?



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