

## **Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaws The Calgary Model**

The City of Calgary is attracting international attention for its progressive and humane animal control policies. The Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaws are based on public education, common-sense rules and targeting known risk factors for animal misbehavior (sexually intact, roaming at large, past behavior, and most of all, irresponsible ownership).

Laws are simple and straight-forward, making compliance as easy as possible, and are based around the following principles:

- License and provide permanent id for your pet
- Spay and neuter unless you are involved in competing or legitimate breeding
- Provide training, socialization and medical care
- Don't allow your pet to become a threat or nuisance to the community

Those who disregard the law are held accountable through escalating fines and strict, thorough enforcement.

The result? The lowest bite rates and euthanasia rates in Canada, with license fees and fines bringing in a revenue stream that funds a climate controlled truck fleet, a networked animal database, and a state-of-the-art facility.

### **Licensing**

Licenses are mandatory for every dog and cat over three months of age. There is a zero tolerance policy for licensing – owners with unlicensed pets will be issued a \$250 fine on the spot. Licensing is \$31/year for a dog (\$52 for an unaltered dog), and it is made as convenient as possible – it can be done by phone, online, at a vet's office, or through special kiosks. Non-renewals are followed up on every year.

Compliance rate for dog licensing is 90% (compared to a 10-20% rate in most cities).

### **The Animal Database**

A city-wide pet database is available to all animal control officers – including those in fleet trucks equipped with laptops. Information is updated every 15 minutes and an Animal Control Officer can check license status, review an animal's history with the City, and even issue a license on the spot.

The animal control database is cross-indexed with microchip information, so a dog doesn't need to wear its tags 24/7. If found as a stray by an animal control officer, the chip can be scanned by a portable reader and the dog taken directly home – often at no charge or minimal charge for a first offense.

### **Fines and Funding**

Under the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw, Animal Control Officers can issue fines ranging from \$75 to \$1500. In 1990, fines for unlicensed dogs were increased from \$30 to \$250, to further encourage enforcement – it is 10X more expensive not to obey the law.

Proceeds from licensing and fines are directed back into animal control (not the city's bank account), contributing to an operating budget of \$3.5 to 4.0 million.

### **Dog Friendly Areas**

Designated off-leash areas are a must – or owners will create their own. Calgary has 138 off-leash areas and are looking to add more. These are fully fenced and separate from biking and pedestrian areas. Owners must have control over their dog – an ACO officer at any time may approach an owner and ask them to call their dog. If the dog does not return, the owner will be fined and asked not to return to the off-leash area until the dog's training has improved). Licensing and clean up are also strictly enforced.

### **Bite Prevention**

A variety of programs are available to those in the community at high-risk of animal attack:

Children – a board certified teacher runs a no-bite program from kindergarten to grade six. There are six different programs in the public school system that teach respect for animals and other living things.

Animal Control Officers – trained in police tactics, negotiation, and animal body language using live animals. When catching strays a catch pole is used only 3% of the time to reduce the animal's distress and minimize the possibility of a dog reacting defensively.

Postal workers – training on dog body language and avoiding territorial conflicts with dogs in a yard. Letter carriers are advised to stop at the property line, make appropriate eye contact with the dog and adopt non-threatening body language and watch the dog's reaction. The letter carrier will also hold the mail and ask the resident to take it rather than reaching outwards. These simple steps have reduced bite rates to Canada Post employees dramatically.

### **Impound and Adoption**

In 2009, 4291 dogs were impounded.

- 86% (3711) were returned to owners
  - 27% (1163) were driven directly home
  - 59% (2568) were picked up from Animal Services
- 9% (377) were adopted to new homes
- 5% (203) were euthanized because of temperament or health issues. (This compares to the BC SPCA's euthanasia rate of 21% and a national average rate of 49%)\*

The licensing and microchip policies have the added benefit of helping stray dogs find their way home, sometimes within hours of being located. It's a service for law-abiding owners and also saves money in shelter costs. The goal for 2010 is to have 50% of stray dogs returned directly home without a shelter stay.

For dogs that do end up in the shelter, their photos are taken and posted online within 15 minutes of their arrival. The dog is also given a check-up and immediate treatment for any medical condition (many shelters will delay medical treatment until the owner is located or the hold period has passed).

The Calgary shelter is a new, state-of-the-art facility with veterinary and dental clinics, funded through licensing and fines. There is space for 85 dogs and 88 cats, and the City will take animals from humane societies and rescues if there is extra room, working as partners to get animals adopted.

Recently they were able to implement a subsidized spay and neuter program for low-income residents.

### **Dog bites**

Every dog bite is investigated, with hours spent gathering data before a decision is made about the fate of the dog – cross-referencing with hospital reports, for example. There are also different classes of dog attacks, including chases, threats, nips (no broken skin), and attacks (broken skin, multiple wounds).

The focus is identifying the underlying cause of animal aggression – usually a well-documented risk factor like sexual intact status, an animal roaming at large, mistreatment or neglect, or irresponsible ownership. The bylaws are in place to intervene and address the problem through the owner's behaviour. For example, there are anti-harrassing and teasing laws in place - if a dog is teased through a fence by children on their way to school every day, the animal is likely to bite a child at some point. If found to be harassing a dog, offenders under 12 are returned home and the parents are fined. If they are over 12, they receive the fine.

Breed isn't a factor in dog bite prevention and there is ongoing public education to address this. The #1 biter in 2008 was a Bichon Frise, but it was a "pit bull" attack that hit the media. When the dog was seized it was found to be a registered Boxer. The registration papers were made available to the media in an effort to address unfair hysteria.

The numbers:

- In the last 18 years, dog bites and chases have decreased by over 50%, while the human and dog populations have doubled.\*\*\*
- Dog bites continue to decrease, from 1938 bites in 1985, to 200 bites in 2004, to 145 bites in 2008. This represents a decrease of 75% while the city's population has doubled.\*\*
- The dog bite rate is 0.14% per 100,000 dogs – by far the lowest ratio in Canada.\*\*

**Sources**

The Responsible Dog Ownership Bylaw - online

<http://content.calgary.ca/CCA/City+Hall/Business+Units/Animal+and+Bylaw+Services/Bylaw+Services/Bylaws+of+Interest/Dogs.htm>

Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics are courtesy of Bill Bruce, Director of Animal and Bylaw Services, City of Calgary.

\*<http://www.sPCA.bc.ca/assets/documents/news--events/animalsense/as-23-springsummer-2010.pdf>

\*\*[http://www.calgarysun.com/news/columnists/michael\\_platt/2009/07/12/10104761-sun.html](http://www.calgarysun.com/news/columnists/michael_platt/2009/07/12/10104761-sun.html)

