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Dog attack highlights city's problem with pit bulls

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POSTED: March 8, 2009

City dog law officer John Iorio has cited a city dog owner for harboring a vicious canine after two pit bulls attacked another dog on a leash Jan. 30.

If Tyrone B. English of the 200 block of Seventh Avenue is found guilty, he'll need to have the dogs euthanized or buy \$50,000 worth of liability insurance, according to the state dog law.

English's animals punctured the belly and genitalia, broke a leg and inflicted wounds on the haunches of a pug being walked by Kevin Burns, 22, who has a mild case of cerebral palsy, said Kevin's father, who has the same name.

The Jan. 30 attack is hardly isolated.

In December, the same dogs attacked a beer deliveryman in East End, sending him to the hospital, Iorio said.

In 2006, two pits owned by English bit a total of five people, after which a vet euthanized them because English couldn't afford liability insurance and a roofed cage, as required by state dog law for canines deemed dangerous.

But it's not just a problem with English's dogs.

Pit bulls comprised 3 percent of the city's licensed dogs last year but were involved in 61 percent of the bite cases Iorio handled, according to information from the city.

"Pit bulls are a problem," Iorio said. "Too many people have pit bulls ... too many run loose."

More than half of his calls are for pits, he said.

In Blair County outside the city, it's not clear how many biting incidents involved pits or even how many pit bulls there are.

Nine of the 14 police departments operating in the area reported no pit bull attacks in 2008, while Logan Township handled only the beer driver incident.

But four other departments didn't return phone messages, while Central Pennsylvania Humane Society officer Paul Gottshall - who took 900 calls last year - and state dog warden Bob Beck both said they don't track incidents by breed.

The county licensed 10,600 dogs last year but has no software capable of determining how many are pit bulls, Treasurer Jim Carothers said.

The attack

On Jan. 30 near 10th Street and First Avenue, English's pit bulls came down an alley and started sniffing Burns' pug, Charlie, according to the son.

The attackers grabbed Charlie's legs and shook.

The son prepared to intervene, but one of the dogs stared at him.

Article Photos



Kevin Burns with his 3-year-old pug, Charlie.

Fact Box

By the numbers

Dog law officer John Iorio handled 178 biting incidents in 2008 - 110 of them, or 61 percent, involving pit bulls.

The city licensed 5,056 dogs last year - 162 of them, or just 3 percent, listed as pit bulls or pit mixes.

Iorio believes the actual number of pit bulls in the city is more like 400, or 8 percent of the total number of licensed dogs, which would reduce the breed's disproportionate share of trouble.

A city official said some owners may list their pit bulls as terriers or by other names; there also may be a fair number of unlicensed pit bulls.

If true, these discrepancies would further reduce the breed's disproportionate share of trouble.