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### 3 Pit Bulls Attack Power Utility Worker

Three pit bulls attacked a power company worker in Port St. John, tearing off the woman's ear and part of her scalp.

Carol Dennison, a 20-year employee with Florida Power & Light Co., was taken to a hospital for surgery. FPL spokesman Sandy Sanderson said Dennison's injuries were critical but not life-threatening.

Dennison, 56, was approaching a fenced-in backyard to read a meter when the dogs jumped the fence and attacked. The worker escaped to her vehicle, then drove about half a mile before stopping at a home for help.

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### Counties wrestle dog-attack issues

BY JEFF SCHWEERS

Almost two years have passed since four pit bulls leaped over a fence and mauled FPL meter reader Carol Dennison, ripping off her scalp and an ear.

Dennison still works for Florida Power & Light, but no longer in the field. She received a \$1 million settlement in April from the property owner's insurance company, and she's had extensive surgery to reattach her scalp, her lawyer Jim Nance said. More surgery is scheduled.

"She's a very tough lady," Nance said. "She's handling this a heck of a lot better than most people."

Meanwhile, the dogs that attacked her are still alive, despite a court order to destroy them. While the owner appeals the order, the dogs are in the county's care.

Brevard County has among the strictest animal control rules in the state, but even the strictest regulations can't guarantee against dog attacks.

There have been eight dog attacks on Brevardians in the past three months, two of them resulting in severe injuries.

Last year, a 1-year-old child was attacked by a pit bull and required eight stitches.

None compare with what happened to Dennison.

But what happened to her can't compare to what happened to 4-year-old Myles Leakes three months ago in Orlando when three pit bulls killed him in his uncle's back yard.

Orange County's animal control regulations, like Brevard's, are based on state laws, but commissioners there want to make them even tougher.

"We wouldn't even be talking about this if it weren't for the death of Myles Leakes," said Orange County Commissioner Homer Hartage.

#### Counties wrestle dog-attack issues



**Attack scene.** Four pit bull dogs attacked Florida Power & Light worker Carol Dennison near this Port St. John home in June 2003. Despite a court order to destroy the dogs, they are in Brevard County care while the owner appeals the order. BY JEFF SCHWEERS FLORIDA TODAY

**Almost two years have passed since**

## **County's options**

"We know where the pedophiles live so we can protect our kids from them," Hartage said. "We should protect ourselves from dangerous dogs as well."

Commissioner Bob Sindler, a veterinarian who helped write the state's dangerous dog law when he was in the Legislature, said staff will see what different communities have on their books. But nothing, he said, can take the place of responsible ownership.

"It's obviously not a perfect system," he said, "but it gives you tools to punish people who act irresponsibly or criminally."

## **Rules in place**

"They're going where we are already, with restraints, putting dangerous dogs on their web site," Brown said. "We do all that."

Barbara Ammon, an assistant county attorney, said the county's animal services agency does a good job investigating and punishing owners of dangerous dogs. "It's one of strictest in the state, and effective," she said. "They implement the law."

But even good laws can't prevent bad things from happening.

"They generally come after the fact," Ammon said.

Orange County also is considering banning certain dog breeds, something Brevard has considered but ruled as unenforceable, Brown said.

"We've talked about it a few times within the department and with county government types," Brown said. "It comes up about every time something like this happens."

It would be difficult to do. After Miami-Dade outlawed pit bulls years ago, the state Legislature passed a law that prevents counties from banning specific breeds.

That's not what Amanda Ibrahim, 19, of Cocoa, wanted to hear.

Last year, a small pit bull attacked her baby while she fought to keep it away from him. Amanda's mother threw the child over the fence to protect him from the dog. The boy, now 2, wound up getting eight stitches in his stomach.

"They should keep them out of the city limits," Ibrahim said. "They should ban pit bulls."

Satellite Beach resident Benjamin Brewer's two pit bulls were declared dangerous dogs after an attack on a postal officer, and he thinks it's an unfair rap.

Four of the eight dogs that attacked people in the last three months were pit bulls, county records show. And 25 percent of the dangerous dogs listed in Brevard County are pit bulls.

"Pits are no better or worse than any other living animal on the planet," Brewer said. "All dogs have potential to be a bad dog, it falls on the owner. It's just like raising a child."