

## Charleston WV Daily Mail

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### Pit bull kills 2-year-old in Huntington

by George Gannon, Daily Mail staff

Family members of a 2-year-old girl who was killed when a dog attacked her at a home in Huntington's Guyandotte neighborhood say the family had visited there before with no trouble.

Arianna Fleeman was killed Tuesday evening when a pit bull at 210 Buffington St. attacked her, according to the girl's aunt, Cindy Fleeman-Brown.

Arianna, her 3-year-old sister and their mother, Brittany Fleeman, were at the home when the girl got away from the family and encountered the animal.

The girl's mother injured her hands when she tried to fend off the dog after it attacked Arianna, Fleeman-Brown said.

The 3-year-old was not injured, but she apparently witnessed the incident.

"She saw the whole thing," Fleeman-Brown said.

Brittany Fleeman was still in the hospital, and Fleeman-Brown said family members haven't been able to talk to her very much.

"We're just trying to help her get through this," said Fleeman-Brown, who was taking care of the 3-year-old today.

She first learned of the incident when the hospital called her home about 9:30 p.m.

Tuesday. They were looking for Jason Fleeman, the girl's father.

He had injured his ankle mowing grass that afternoon, and was at St. Mary's Hospital getting treatment.

Fleeman-Brown said the family is gathering to deal with a tragic situation as best they can.

"Under the circumstances, we're doing OK," she said.

Firefighters responding to Tuesday's attack had to use a carbon dioxide spray canister to force the dog away from the 2-year-old girl, said Huntington police Sgt. Dan Underwood.

The pit bull attacked the girl's throat, said Deputy Chief Jerry Beckett of the Huntington Fire Department.

She was taken to Cabell-Huntington Hospital where she was pronounced dead at about 9:30 p.m., Underwood said.

"The girl, her mother and at least two other people were apparently hanging out on the house's porch," Underwood said. "The homeowner apparently told them all to stay out of the house where the dog was."

"Beware of dog" signs were posted at the house. Nobody was charged as of late Tuesday.

Police went in the house with shotguns and were able to get a noose around the dog's neck, Beckett said.

The pit bull was taken away by animal control officers, Underwood said.

The dog was taken to the Huntington-Cabell-Wayne Animal Control Shelter, where it is being kept in isolation.

A hearing is scheduled for Thursday in city court concerning whether or not the animal will be put down, a shelter spokeswoman said.

Mayor David Felinton called the incident "disgusting" and said the thoughts and prayers of the entire city were with the girl's family.

He said the city has fairly strict standards about potentially violent dogs, specifically pit bulls, rottweilers and any wolf-dog hybrid.

The animals are not allowed to roam free. If they are out, the owners must have them on a leash, and they must also wear a muzzle.

The Guyandotte area where the attack occurred was not known for having major animal control problems, but Felinton said complaints could get passed on without him knowing about it.

Vicious dogs are only part of the problem.

Felinton said if someone is going to own a potentially violent animal, it is very important to take the proper precautions.

"Certain people should not have animals, and this is a prime example," he said.

It's unclear if criminal charges will be filed against the dog's owner, but Felinton said he was going to meet with the police chief to see what, if any, legal action can be taken.

"It's going to be a major topic of discussion when I talk to the chief," he said.

Charleston has had its share of pit bull problems.

Several attacks in 2002 caused then-Mayor Jay Goldman to issue a memo in which he instructed police officers not to hesitate to shoot attacking dogs.

In two instances that year, Charleston police officers shot and killed pit bulls because they were attacking people. Both dogs were killed.

A Charleston man spent a year in jail for provoking a pit bull to bite a city police officer.

Other area towns have had problems too.

In 2003, after a pit bull attacked a postal worker, the St. Albans ordinance committee considered a breed-specific ban on pit bulls, rottweilers and Doberman pinschers.

The committee eventually settled for stiffer fines and clearer definitions of existing laws.

*Daily Mail reporter Drew Smith and The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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