

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Animal Services Workers Safety Precautions

An Animal Services Clerk at an animal services centre was mauled by an American bulldog that was brought in by a member of the public. The incident left the clerk with permanent disabling injuries to her left arm as the flesh and muscles were extensively damaged or torn away.

What happened?

The bulldog had already been secured by a leash (0.91 metres long) to a wall ring (1.14 metres above floor level) in the hallway that led to a number of offices. At the time the bulldog was secured, he did not exhibit any aggressive behaviour. The bulldog was able to jump up and grab the worker by the arm as she was exiting the office being used to register the dog. The bulldog weighed approximately 90 kilograms and easily brought the worker to the floor during the attack. Other animal service workers hit the dog with brooms and dog control sticks, and used a water hose to spray into the dog's mouth, but could not free the clerk being attacked. The injured worker was only freed after the dog was tranquilized.

Contributing factors

The Animal Service Centre was not designed to facilitate safe handling of large or unpredictable animals brought in by the public to the front office. The hallway at the location of the registration offices where the animals were secured was narrow enough that a person was vulnerable to attack even if an animal was on a short leash.

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A hazard assessment had not been completed at the facility of incident for the hazards of handling potentially dangerous animals. An Animal Health Technician at the same facility had also received injuries requiring five stitches from an animal bite some months prior to the latest incident.

Staff at the Animal Service Centre had not received adequate training in assessing and handling potentially dangerous or unpredictable animals.

The Animal Service Centre did not have an Emergency Response Plan to handle an animal attack such as the one that caused serious injury to the clerk. The Animal Service Centre did not have the proper equipment for workers to be able to disable an attacking animal.

The bulldog that initiated the attack was wearing an electronic dog control collar that was not functional due to the absence of a battery. It was later determined that this animal was known to be aggressive as he had attacked several members of the public in the past and the registered owner had received fines.

Safety requirements according to the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Legislation

The employers of the Animal Service Centre staff must conduct a hazard assessment of all potential conditions or circumstances that may arise during animal handling and develop hazard elimination or control measures. [OHS Code, Sections 7, 8, 9] For the incident described, the employer conducted a comprehensive hazard assessment and one of the temporary control measures was to install a second animal securement ring near floor level so that animal leashes would be strung through the lower ring and be latched to the top ring. This would prevent animals from jumping up. Any new facilities in the planning stages should consider hazard elimination/control measures into the design of the facilities.

The employers of the Animal Services Centre staff are required to have an emergency response plan that includes a rescue plan and equipment “appropriate to the worksite and potential emergencies identified”. For this incident, the employer purchased a bite stick and a cattle prod which could deliver an electric shock to an attacking animal to neutralize the animal. An air horn was supplied and spray bottles with vinegar/water solution were made available. A formal Emergency Response Plan was developed. [OHS Code, Sections 115 to 118]

The employers of the Animal Services Centre staff must adequately train their employees for tasks they will be required to handle. [OHS Regulation, Sections 13, 15]

For this incident, the employer

- Reviewed the *Employee Training and Reference Guide for Animal Intake and Release* with their staff and modified the procedures for handling potentially dangerous animals.
- Developed an *Administration Staff Guide to Working Safely with Dogs*. The contents of this guide were reviewed with all workers and the procedures of this guide were implemented at the facility.
- Retained the services of a certified professional dog trainer to first visit the facility for a period of three days for a needs assessment. This person then developed site-specific training for the staff and delivered the training in reading and understanding canine body language and effectively communicating with dogs (basic animal handling training).
- Posted a listing of dog types that would not be handled by clerical staff at the facility.

This Safety Bulletin was developed to assist all animal shelters, animal services centres, humane society facilities and SPCA facilities to be aware of potential hazards and worker injury prevention measures while handling unpredictable or potentially dangerous animals.

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Workplace Health and Safety



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