

# Dog bites could become more costly for owners

Moscow council looking at tougher city ordinance

By David Johnson of the Tribune

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

MOSCOW - Suppose your dog slips its leash, jumps the fence, runs across the street and bites a neighbor.

First of all, Fido's flight amounts to breaking the local leash law and you could be fined in the neighborhood of \$50.

As for Fido taking a chunk out of the neighbor, you might soon face up to a \$1,000 fine, not to mention six months in jail.

Members of the city of Moscow administrative committee on Monday not only called for continued enforcement of the leash law, but also endorsed a proposed change in the vicious dog ordinance that would make violation a misdemeanor instead of what is currently an infraction.

"Recently we've had some unfortunate events where we've had vicious dogs that have attacked people and caused some really severe damage," City Attorney Randy Fife told committee members. "It's my proposal here to change a violation from an infraction, with just a small fine, to a misdemeanor that I think reflects the problem with people who aren't properly controlling their dogs."

Fife said the proposed change would bring city code in line with state law. All three committee members - Chairman John Weber, Bill Lambert and Tom Lamar - agreed to send the proposal on to the full city council for further consideration.

Police Chief Dan Weaver also called for the change. "It makes no sense to have an animal-at-large offense more severe than a vicious animal," he said. "So I wholly concur with the recommendations Randy has put forth."

Lamar also asked for clarification of the city's leash law.

"Any (dog) within the city limits needs to be on a leash anytime they're on public property," Weaver said. "On private property, you would not need to have a leash. But the minute the dog sets foot on the sidewalk, they would."

Fife clarified that dogs may go off leash only on their owner's private property. "If it's someone else's private property, they need to be on a leash."

It's also illegal, said Fife, for a person to tie their dog and leave, such as some people do when they tether dogs to bike racks downtown or in front of grocery stores while shopping.

"There has to be a person on the other end of the leash from the dog," Fife said.

Weber said the misdemeanor status for violations of the vicious dog ordinance is needed, but he added the leash law seems to be working. "I live in a dog neighborhood and I have noticed that almost everyone is paying pretty close attention to the leash law. They're walking in front of my house all the time, big ones, little ones, and they're all on leashes."

The proposed change to the vicious dog ordinance could go on the agenda for the council's Feb. 17 meeting.

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