



Police Officers Shoot Family Pets

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The Doggie Gazette was sent a story about the problem of Police officers shooting dogs. The article was too long to use and filled with links to numerous web sites filled with anecdotal stories of dog shootings. We were appalled that this is a problem involving dogs that are not attacking at all or could have been easily subdued. Here is a distillation of that story with some additions of our own from a recent report from the U.S. department of Justice office of Community Oriented Policing Services:

Dogs of all sizes and breeds are shot by police with little and in many cases no provocation. In many of these cases law enforcement cites their reason for shooting canine companions as fear for their life/safety. It is not unusual for police reports of dog shooting incidents to greatly differ from first-hand witness accounts of the same incident. Here are examples of dog shooting cases that easily illustrate the need for law enforcement training in handling canine companion encounters:

- A 5-pound Blue Ash, Ohio Chihuahua named Jack
- A toothless 15 year old arthritic, Warrenton, South Carolina German Shepherd named Abby because the deputy “saw teeth”
- A tethered, 8 year old Spartanburg, South Carolina shepherd mix named Diamond because “there was a chance the tether could have slipped off which would have resulted in Officer Boutin being bitten”
- “Everything beautiful and gentle that angels are made of” - A Fort Worth, Texas Border Collie Lily was shot because Officer Brown showed up at the wrong address, Lily’s address, to investigate a report of copper theft from an air conditioner and refused Lily’s dad’s repeated requests/beggings to stop coming up the driveway until he put Lily and Doggie sister Grace in the backyard.

Three fourths of shooting incidents in Milwaukee from January 2000 to September 2002 involved shots fired at dogs with 44 dogs killed by officers. In California at least half of all intentional discharges of a firearm by an officer from 2000 – 2005 involved animals. There are no documented cases of Police or Peace Officers dying as a result of a dog-bite related injury anywhere in the U.S.

Law Enforcement's own publication "Law Enforcement Today" warns "Officers need to be concerned about the possibility of a lawsuit being filed if an officer is involved in a dog shooting!"

Jim Osorio, a former police officer now trains police in non-lethal methods used in dog-encounters. According to Jim Osorio, "there are dogs in about one in three households — nearly 80 million in all." He says officers shoot about 250,000 dogs a year... often needlessly. "I'm going to train them that whatever they carry can be used on an animal," Osario explained ... "Clipboard, flare... whatever" Mr. Osorio further asks for a show of hands in the police auditorium. "How many people here think they can handle a dog encounter without lethal force? I think all of you can," he said.

Mr. Osorio's training of the Fort Worth police department comes after police shot a Border Collie belonging to Mark and Cindy Boling. The Bolings apparently extracted the new training regimen as a condition of not suing over the video-recorded incident, which occurred when officers mistakenly arrived at their door. That video is played during the classes. (I would have added a clause that all bets are off if another area dog is shot by police.)

According to the ASPCA most Instances of Police Shooting Dogs Are Avoidable

Seattle Times: Half of Intentional Shootings by Police Involve Dogs

There are two major factors to consider in pet shootings. First of all, did the police know a dog was on the premises before entering the home? If the answer is yes, and the family dog is shot, it suggests that police were negligent in finding a non-lethal method to subdue the dog. Second, how long had the police department been planning to enter the home in an intrusive manner? A few days? A week? Long enough for a police department to come up with a safe method to secure any dogs on the premises? In 1998 in San Jose, California a multijurisdictional raid on 2 Hell's Angel homes resulted in the shooting of 3 dogs. The dog owners sued and were awarded \$1.8 million in total from all the involved departments. All appeals were struck down because the police failed to consider ways to isolate the dogs or deal with them non-lethally in the over 3-week planning of the raid.

Dog fear levels in some members of law enforcement are deadly obvious. It appears lack of adequate training of our law enforcement officers, and poor policy enforcement are directly related to the unacceptably high number of dog shooting cases each year. With adequate training and policy enforcement, it's highly probable that Law Enforcement can join the ranks of all of these people who have very high numbers of encounters with canine companions, who do not fear for their lives and safety and who do not shoot dogs: veterinarians, vet techs, animal control officers, assisted-therapy dog trainers, patients visited by therapy dogs, guide dog trainers, disabled people with guide dogs, armed forces members, postal carriers, UPS & FEDEX delivery staff, animal groomers & trainers, dog walkers, rescue & shelter staff, animal photographers, landscapers, and more.

This lack of training is bad for innocent bystanders as well. In Detroit in 2010 an animal control officer was injured by "friendly fire" when police shot at 2 dogs "running at large". Another major victim of this problem is the Public trust in our Police forces. What's happening in your area?