

Getting a grip on pit bull dangers

Biting statistics: Vancouver needs to acknowledge unpredictabilities and impose strict regulations

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SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN

Many people in Vancouver have no idea how unpredictable pit bull-type dogs can be, nor the damage they can cause.

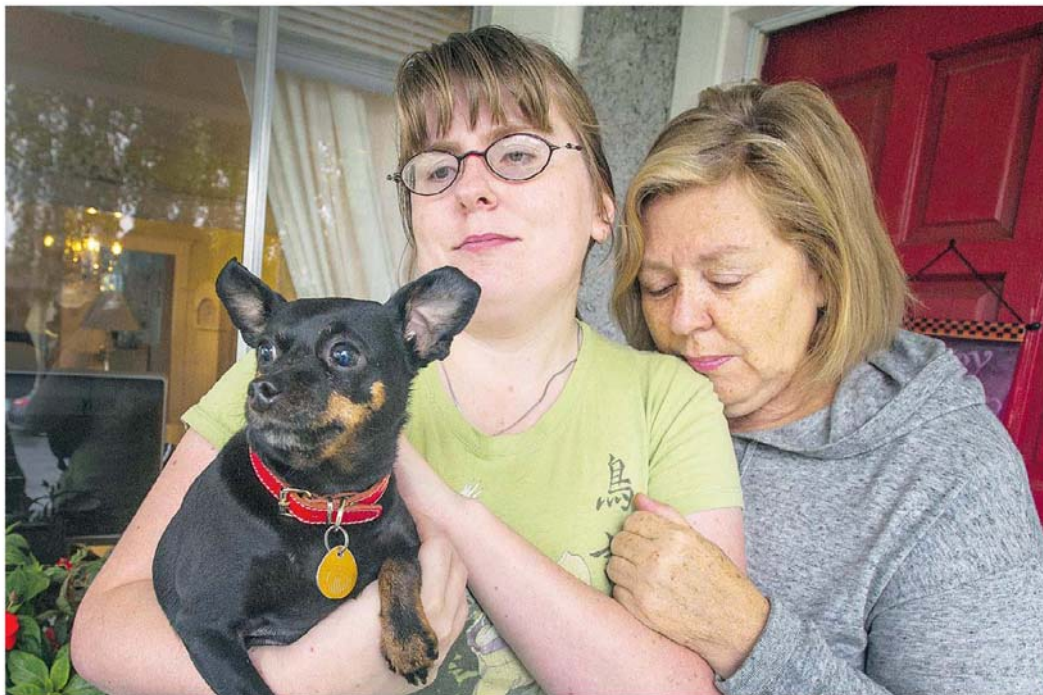
Vancouver needs to formally acknowledge the potential danger of pit bull-type dogs. We need to enforce mandatory neutering and spaying, require they be muzzled in public, and stem the tide of pit bull importation.

The pit bull crisis in the United States is a cautionary tale. Pit bull attacks stateside have risen 773 per cent in the past seven years.

In Portland, Ore., a city the size of Vancouver, there were 510 pit bull attacks over the past four years. In only four months, pit bulls kill as many people as Dobermans killed in the past 60 years. Pit bulls killed as many American people in the last 30 months as black bears killed in the past 115 years, yet no one would allow a black bear to sleep with their child. Pit bulls, well known to be aggressive to other animals, were responsible for 95 per cent of the 15,000 dogs killed by other dogs in the U.S. last year.

We need to act on warnings by the American SPCA and PETA that pit bulls are aggressive. The American Veterinary Medical Association says fatal attacks on humans are a "breed-specific problem" with pit bulls. No other dog attacks as viciously, often to the point of eating the victim's flesh and body parts. The American SPCA even recommends panic buttons and restraining equipment for pit bulls in its shelters.

Breed-specific bylaws do not entail going door-to-door and removing pit bulls from their owners. They simply provide a remedy for what many pit bull owners and rescue groups fail to do on their own. Numerous studies in the States show fewer than 25 per cent of pit bull owners spay or neuter their dogs, even when offered at no cost. There are so many pit bulls in American shelters, they are often given away for free. The number of pit bulls at no-kill shelters increased six times in 2014. Pit bulls account for 63 per cent of the dogs put down in shelters, with more than 900,000 pit bulls destroyed every year, six times the number of other types of dogs. Breed-specific sterilization should be the first step



Mia Johnson with her daughter, Laurel, and surviving dog, Mary. In cities just outside of Vancouver, pit bull-type dogs are banned or restricted.

ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG FILES

to curtailing what PETA calls a "human-safety issue" with pit bulls.

The situation will rapidly become worse as the pit bull population grows in Vancouver. Without laws, regulation or government monitoring, thousands of dogs are entering B.C. with no background checks and no records of where they go. Many are rescued pit bull-type dogs and mixes, who for 32 per cent of the dogs in U.S. shelters. There is no way to know if they were surrendered for aggression or if they were trained to kill and abandoned. The B.C. SPCA already transports and relocates to homes more than 16,000 dogs per year, and Canada destroys more than one million healthy dogs annually. Yet Air Angels Canada estimated more than 10,000 additional dogs were imported from the U.S. in 2014 by rescue groups.

Given the ferocity, unpredictability and the frequency of their attacks, restrictions on pit bulls should be obvious. But few movements are as vociferous as pit bull advocacy, and it

Pit bull top breed for bites

Serious dog bites by breed 1982-2014 in Canada and the U.S.

Breed	Deaths	Maimings	Breed as % of dog population
Pit bull	295	2,110	6.69%
Rottweiler	85	296	2.76%
Husky	26	27	1.04%
Wolf hybrid	19	49	
Bullmastiff (Presa canario)	18	63	0.02%
German shepherd	15	73	3.72%
Pit bull-mix	12	115	
Akita	8	52	0.07%
Chow	8	40	0.01%
Doberman	8	12	1.70%
Unidentified	8	32	
Boxer	7	31	1.25%
German shepherd-mix	7	30	

Source: DogsBite.org

is well funded. Best Friends Animal Society, promoters of pit bull-type dogs in the U.S., generated \$66.6 million US in 2014. Animal Farm Foundation Inc., an advocacy group larger

than the average American charitable organization, made enough money in 2014 to keep 80 per cent of it for themselves.

The political arrogance of powerful groups like these has

distorted reason and deceived pit bull enthusiasts to the point at which potentially vicious dogs are relentlessly promoted as companion animals to children and even babies.

Despite the strident and profitable lobbying of pit bull activists, there are many precedents for stricter legislation.

Vancouver is surrounded by cities such as Richmond, Burnaby and West Vancouver in which pit bull-type dogs are banned or restricted. Ontario banned pit bulls for the entire province in 2005. More than 41 countries in the world restrict pit bulls, and they are banned on all U.S. military bases as well as in more than 860 U.S. cities and counties. No countries except Canada and the U.S. even allow their importation.

That is how seriously pit bulls are taken in places outside Vancouver.

Mia Johnson's miniature pinscher Yuri was a service dog for her daughter, who has autism and anxiety. Yuri was killed while walking on-leash by a pit bull in an unprovoked attack.

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