

BICKERING DOES LITTLE TO STOP DOG ATTACKS

Adults, children, other animals get hurt while arguments, denials continue

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So, another beautiful day in Metro Vancouver, another ugly dog mauling.



SHANE MACKICHAN Emergency workers tend to a 65-year-old woman who was walking by a convenience store in Surrey last week when she was attacked by an off-leash grey and white pit bull. The attack was unprovoked. The victim's injuries include multiple fractures and cuts to her forearm.

This time, it's a woman savaged in South Vancouver, the second such attack in a week.

Earlier came the mauling of a 65-year-old woman in Surrey. In that case the victim, reportedly so viciously bitten that bones protruded, was abandoned to bleed while the dog's owner took his pet home.

Frankly, it's time we began dealing like adults with what's a growing public safety issue. Right now we respond with denial, disagreement, disputation and an incoherent hodgepodge of apparently ineffective municipal bylaws. We argue over statistics, breeds, bylaws and liability. What we don't do is grapple effectively with the problem.

Look, the **Canada Safety Council** estimates that annually 460,000 Canadians suffer dog bites. That's roughly an incident a minute. Yes, many bites are minor. But **one in six requires medical treatment**. The vast majority of victims — **70 per cent — are children**. The math suggests about 54,000 bitten kids need medical attention yearly. **Dog bite injury is now a bigger public health threat to children than measles, mumps and whooping cough combined, the council says.** Yet dog bites are not even a reportable injury.

If a cougar shows up near a school ground — there have been about six fatal cougar attacks in Canada in the last 100 years — we ruthlessly hunt it down and kill it but let 322,000 kids get bitten by dogs. Do the math: unabated that would total 32.2 million over the next century. Meh, what's the problem?

Before these most recent attacks two young women were mauled in a Richmond park while shielding a toddler. One suffered more than 100 bite wounds, a fractured arm and her bicep was detached. A Good Samaritan senior who intervened was also bitten. Seven months ago two seniors were mauled and maimed in their Fort St. John home by a rampaging dog pack. A 55-year-old Montreal woman was killed in her backyard by a neighbour's dog. A four-year-old was fatally mauled in Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut. Four-year-old twins were hospitalized with facial injuries following a mauling in Vegreville, Alta. A Saskatoon woman was severely bitten by a dog that just came hurtling out of the darkness while she sat in her backyard chatting with a friend. A 71-year-old Alberta woman was mauled while walking in a Rocky Mountain House park. Another Alberta woman was injured in Sundre. A woman in Wainwright was savaged. A dog sent two teenage boys to hospital in St. Albert.

That's the people. Then there are the canine victims. Fatal dog attacks on other, usually smaller, often elderly dogs, are reported from just about everywhere just about all the time.

They range from the fatal mauling of Hershey, an elderly Labrador having a quiet snooze in an Alberta backyard to four off-leash mastiffs ripping apart a dachshund in a Toronto park. While Dacky's horrified 81-year-old owner was left to deal with the carnage, the mastiffs' owner gathered his dogs and left. In Airdrie, Alta., two large dogs leaped out of a parked vehicle and killed Fergie, a leashed Yorkshire terrier, in front of its owner.

There's the vicious mauling of a cocker spaniel by two larger dogs in a Calgary park, after which the owners walked away showing no concern for the injured dog. There's the cockapoo out for a walk on a leash when savaged by a larger dog that was off-leash; there are the three Shih Tzu Bichon crosses killed in unrelated attacks in Calgary.

And on it goes. Invermere, Cawston, Kelowna, Victoria, Keremeos, White Rock, Fairmont Hot Springs, Surrey, Saanich, North Vancouver, Delta, across Alberta, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes, the North.

Community newspapers carry accounts of dog attacks, the vast majority of which don't catch the attention of mainstream media because they are now so common they aren't news unless someone is killed, maimed or disfigured.

Frankly, federal politicians need to step up. Time to make dog owners fully accountable for what their pets do to people or animals.

How about a provision in the Criminal Code? If a dog kills or causes bodily harm, let the owner face jail time, just as negligent drivers do.

Then, perhaps, all dog owners will start taking their responsibilities seriously.