



# DOG BITES MAN

**USPS ranks the worst cities in the U.S. for dog attacks**

**S**ome things in life are certain, like death and taxes. Another near certainty is that dogs will bite letter carriers. According to the Postal Service, dogs bit 5,581 postal employees in 2013, the most recent year figures are available. That figure is 5 percent lower than the number of dog attacks in 2012.

“Still, that’s 5,581 too many,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “Dog attacks of letter carriers remain a serious threat.”

Thirty-two Americans died from dog attacks in 2013, half of them children under the age of 7. At least two letter carriers have died as the result of dog attacks since 2010, and several more suffered severe injuries—sometimes severe enough to end their careers.

“A dog attack may be mild, but it can also cause grave injury, or even death,” NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. said. “Letter carriers should take the threat seriously.”

The Postal Service ranked cities by the number of dog bites, and Houston led with 63 reported attacks on postal employees



in 2013. Los Angeles, Cleveland and San Diego followed, each with more than 50 dog attacks reported.

Letter carriers in Houston are well aware of the persistent dog threat in their city, **Willie Ferguson**, president of Houston Branch 283, said. The threat extends beyond dogs in patrons' homes or yards.

"There are certain neighborhoods you can go to and find loose dogs. You'll find a lot of pack dogs—three or four dogs running in packs," he said. "I think they have a relaxed law as far as loose dogs go."

The attitude of some dog owners doesn't help, Ferguson added. Some dog owners underestimate the threat and don't take precautions to keep their animals away from letter carriers. "Everybody seems to think their dog won't bite," he said.

In other cases, dog owners just don't seem to care much about letter carriers' safety.

"Some of these people think more of their dogs than they do of us," Ferguson said. When their dogs attack a carrier, "they'll check their dog before they check you." A dog owner may even blame the carrier for the attack.

In 22 years of carrying mail in Houston, Ferguson was bitten four times.

**José Salazar**, who has carried mail 29 years in Houston, said he has lost count: "I've been bitten eight or nine times." The last time was Christmas Eve in 2013 when he walked past a house with a pit-bull-breed dog in the yard.

"They had him tied up to a little bitty chain on a tree," he said. As Salazar walked toward the house, the dog lunged, and he knew he was in trouble when he heard the chain snap.

"I threw my satchel in front of me, but he got my left hand," he said. Salazar went to a doctor, received an antibiotic injection and was checked for internal damage to his hand, but luckily it was only bruised.

Salazar said some people in the neighborhoods on his route breed dogs, and others feed strays. Dog owners often fail to take precautions to protect letter carriers from attack. "I don't blame it on the dogs," he said. "I blame the people."

With so many new carriers out on the streets these days, Salazar urged them to pay attention to the dog threat even as they learn all of the other details of the job. "I know it's hard to carry the mail, but you still have to keep an eye out," he said. Be wary when you pass a dog or a place where dogs might lurk, he said, adding: "Most dogs attack from behind you."

Recently hired Houston letter carrier **Shontol Ballard** has already learned lessons about dogs. She had been on the job for only six months last June when a dog found a way out of a gate next door to the home where she was delivering a package.

She saw three dogs barking at her from behind a fence at the house next door, but she thought the fence would contain them. "You keep barking; you keep jumping," she thought to herself, until she saw one of the dogs climb—not jump, but climb—over the gate and run toward her. "I didn't think a dog could climb a gate," she said. "He proved me wrong." The dog, which Ballard said was a pit bull, bit her in the left hand and was later euthanized.



Above: Images from Bethlehem, PA, where in 2012, Branch 254 member Lisa Earich was severely attacked. Her regular route included walking by a fenced yard with a dog, known for being aggressive. As she was walking between deliveries near the yard, she saw the dog force open the gate and approach her. Earich made it to the porch of a neighbor and yelled for help when the pit bull jumped on her from behind and wrapped its jaws around her head. The dog pulled her backwards and forced her to the ground. Earich used dog spray, punched the dog, and, with the help of the neighbor, forced the dog off of her. One of the teeth caught the corner of her eye. She received more than 70 stitches for the wound. She spent the night in the hospital and missed a short period of work, but returned and now delivers a different route.





Hao Yun "Eddie" Lin of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100, died in 2010 from injuries received while trying to avoid a dog attack on his route.

Before that incident, Ballard was nipped on the finger when she stuffed some mail into a door slot.

"I learned my lesson," she said.

Though Houston was the 2013 leader in dog attacks, the threat is spread broadly across the country. No matter where you work, a dog attack can transform a routine day into a life-changing nightmare, even when you think you are safe.

Torrance, CA Branch 2207 member **Moon Choi**, now retired, was walking past a home on his route on a summer day in 2007. The house, where two pit bull-breed dogs lived, was surrounded by a high fence with the mailbox on the outside. "When I got to the house, I didn't have any mail for them that day," he said. He told someone standing in the yard that he had no deliveries and walked past.

Those circumstances didn't seem to bring much of a risk of dog attack. Nevertheless, one of the dogs apparently jumped the fence and attacked him—Choi can't say for sure because he was knocked unconscious and awoke lying in the street after the dog was gone.

"I heard someone calling my name," he said. Paramedics were trying to revive him, but he fell unconscious again. Choi woke up in the intensive care unit. "There were bandages all over my face," he said. His injuries required reconstructive surgery.

Choi, a native of Korea who served in that country's army before coming to the United States, was back to work in two months. "I'm kind of a tough guy," he said. "Everybody seemed surprised to see me back at work" after such a severe attack. The dog was later destroyed. Choi learned afterward that there had been many complaints about the dog—but he wishes he had known about that before the attack.

A dog attack can even kill you. It doesn't have to be a pack of dogs at-

tacking, and the dog doesn't even have to bite.

Out on his route in Oceanside, CA, in June of 2010, **Hao Yun "Eddie" Lin** of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 died of head injury after falling, apparently while trying to avoid an aggressive Rottweiler. He left behind a wife and three young children. The dog was reported to have attacked letter carriers in the past.

Tragedy struck again two years later, this time in nearby Escondido, CA, where **Diane Jansen** of Escondido Branch 2525 was attacked in March of 2012. According to news reports, the dog escaped through a partially opened garage door and bit Jansen's leg several times. She suffered a brain hemorrhage and died in a hospital three days later.

"Dogs biting letter carriers is a common joke among the public, but to us, it is a life-and-death issue," Rolando said. "It's a major hazard of carrying the mail."

New carriers need to learn how to protect themselves from dogs, but experienced carriers also may need to refresh their memories and avoid becoming complacent about the threat, Peralta said. "Letter carriers who are new to carrying mail may not know how to deal with dogs, and veteran carriers may have forgotten. Whatever your status, you should stop and think again about the threat of dogs and how to handle them, because that's what assures you'll go home at night instead of to the hospital," he said.

Peralta urged carriers to stay aware of their surroundings at all times and to keep an eye out for places where dogs may be found, such as under parked cars, on porches or in dog houses. "And like any danger on your route, it's harder to detect a threatening dog when you are wearing headphones, so leave the music at your case," Peralta warned.



# WORST CITIES FOR DOG BITES

These are the number of dog attacks reported to the Postal Service by postal workers, by city, in 2013. Cities are ranked by overall bites, meaning carriers in cities with smaller populations may have a greater proportional risk of being attacked.

RANK	CITY	ATTACKS	RANK	CITY	ATTACKS	RANK	CITY	ATTACKS
1	Houston, TX	63	18	Miami, FL	23	28	Bakersfield, CA	13
2	Los Angeles, CA	61	19	Fresno, CA	22		Dayton, OH	
3	Cleveland, OH	58		Long Beach, CA			Fort Wayne, IN	
4	San Diego, CA	53		Oakland, CA			Las Vegas, NV	
5	Chicago, IL	47		San Antonio, TX			New Orleans, LA	
6	Baltimore, MD	46		Wichita, KS			Van Nuys, CA	
7	Dallas, TX	45	20	Detroit, MI	21	29	Atlanta, GA	12
8	Denver, CO	41	21	Jacksonville, FL	20		Aurora, CO	
9	Columbus, OH	39		Oklahoma City, OK			Milwaukee, WI	
10	Kansas City, MO	33		San Francisco, CA			San Juan, PR	
11	Minneapolis, MN	32		Tulsa, OK			Youngstown, OH	
	Phoenix, AZ		22	Memphis, TN	19	30	Cedar Rapids, IA	11
12	Portland, OR	31	23	Brooklyn, NY	18		Des Moines, IA	
13	Sacramento, CA	30		Rochester, NY			Evansville, IN	
14	Indianapolis, IN	29	24	Washington, DC	17		Richmond, CA	
15	Philadelphia, PA	28	25	Pittsburgh, PA	16		Richmond, VA	
	Seattle, WA		26	Austin, TX	15		Salt Lake City, UT	
	St Louis, MO			Louisville, KY			Santa Ana, CA	
16	Cincinnati, OH	26	27	Baton Rouge, LA	14			
	Fort Worth, TX			El Paso, TX				
	San Jose, CA			Flushing, NY				
17	Charlotte, NC	25		Springfield, MO				

Don't assume that a dog you've seen before on your route, even one that is generally friendly, won't change its mind and feel threatened by your approach. "Man's best friend can be a letter carrier's enemy in a heartbeat," Peralta said. "Even a dog that appears friendly, or has been friendly in the past, or one whose owner says doesn't bite, should be treated with caution. Don't judge them by the breed either, because any kind of dog can attack, and even a small dog can injure you."

Don't assume a barrier will keep a dog from reaching you. Dogs can jump fences, as Choi found out the hard way, break through screens, and even crash right through glass windows and doors when attacking letter carriers.

"Dogs are more likely to bite when you aren't looking—so keep your attention on any dog as long as you can," Peralta added. "If a dog is asleep or doesn't see you, don't startle the dog, but do make a gentle noise or call its name, if you know it. Don't reach out your hand to pet it—that could become the hand that's bitten."

If a dog does attack, stand your ground. Turning your back or running will likely only encourage it, and

you could be injured by falling, not to mention become more vulnerable to the dog. Use your satchel or a package between your body and the dog, and use dog repellent spray if possible. Have the spray in hand if you are coming close to a dog. Make sure every morning that you have a can of spray with you and that it hasn't expired.

If you encounter a dog on your route that appears to be a threat, be sure to put a dog warning card in your case to remind yourself and to warn other carriers on the route. When a patron who owns a threatening dog moves, many carriers forward the card to the station at the new address to warn carriers.

If a dog is such a threat that the mail can't be delivered without serious risk, tell your supervisor—the Postal Service can suspend mail delivery to any address where there is danger to a carrier.

Peralta urged any carrier bitten by a dog to seek immediate treatment, even if the bite is minor, because of the risk of infection.

"A letter carrier's job is hard enough," Rolando said. "Don't let a dog ruin your day, or worse."

For more information, see USPS Publication 174, "How to Avoid Dog Bites." **PR**

## How to Avoid Dog Bites

Dogs and Dog Repellent



Letter carriers are advised to follow the recommendations in USPS Publication 174, "How to Avoid Dog Bites."