

Dog bites decrease, but dangers persist

The possibility of dog attacks is one of the hazards that letter carriers face daily. The number of postal employees attacked by dogs nationwide was 6,244 in 2017, compared to 6,755 the prior year. Overall, the figure for 2017 represents a 7.6 percent reduction in dog attacks across the country. While this reduction is encouraging, efforts to reduce the number of dog attacks continue.

Letter carriers know that the first and most important defense is being aware of where potentially dangerous dogs are along each route. If letter carriers know where these dogs are, they can be cautious and prepared to avoid the dog and a potential attack.

In addition to traditional communication such as among letter carriers, by posters and through stand-up talks, USPS has implemented technology initiatives, including asking customers who use package pickup requests through the Postal Service website, usps.com, to indicate if there are dogs at their addresses when they schedule a pickup. This information is provided to carriers on their delivery scanners, which send alerts if an unleashed dog is reported in a delivery area.

Having this information readily available is a positive step forward, but the possibility of a new dog or a normally restrained dog running free always exists. Letter carriers should be ready to defend themselves. As an on-the-job instructor (OJI), **Erin Terry** urges new letter carriers to remain observant at all times for the threat of a dog attack.

Terry, an Army veteran and member of Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84, has had more than her share of experiences with dangerous dogs since she began carrying the mail in 2014. She has suffered

two serious attacks, both requiring months from work to recover.

In 2015, Terry was approaching a patron's door to put mail through the door slot. The main door was open. As she approached, two dogs pushed the storm door open and charged at her.

"One got on one leg, and the other got on the other leg," Terry said. "I had puncture wounds on both legs and was out of work for about three months."

Then, just a month or so after returning to work, Terry was putting a package on a front porch and, as in the previous incident, a dog pushed its way out the door. This time, there was only one dog—but it did far more damage.

"It literally mauled me from head to toe," she said. A neighbor noticed the attack and called for help. Terry again was rushed to the emergency room, this time with 14 life-threatening puncture wounds. She spent nearly six months off work recovering. Still, after two serious dog attacks and the trauma and fear that followed, Terry returned to carrying the mail because she loves her job.

Terry urges her trainees, and all letter carriers, to take the warnings about dogs seriously. "When you hear these stories, don't think you're an exception, because this is real," she said. "It happened to me, and it could happen to you."

She recommends rattling a fence to make noise to warn a dog of your



presence, and says that carriers might consider skipping delivery when they see an open door or other potentially dangerous situation.

"You always have to be ready," she said. And, Terry added, always bring dog repellent spray.

"Sometimes people forget dog spray and don't think it is that important," she said, "but it is important."

Terry's story has been covered by local television stations. She urges viewers to take simple measures to protect their letter carrier, such as learning when they usually visit a home each day and keeping a dog inside during that time.

The Postal Service advises letter carriers to take proactive measures to protect themselves from dog attacks by keeping a keen eye out for dogs, avoiding signaling that you are afraid of the dog, avoiding startling a dog, standing your ground if a dog charges, and carrying and using dog repellent. If you observe a potentially dangerous situation involving a dog, or are attacked or threatened by a dog, report it to a supervisor. **PR**