

Dog bite reports increased last year

The number of dog attacks reported by letter carriers on their routes increased last year, and the Postal Service is continuing its efforts to help carriers avoid bites. The Postal Service held its annual Dog Bite Awareness campaign last month to focus on the dangers dogs can present to letter carriers.

Under this year's theme "Be Aware: Any Dog Can Bite," and using the hashtag #dogbiteawareness, the awareness campaign focused on educating letter carriers about how to avoid dog attacks and teaching dog owners about how to keep their dogs away from carriers on their routes.

Though USPS did not release the number of dog attacks reported by carriers in 2020, it said the figure was higher than the 5,803 reported attacks in 2019. The top five cities for dog attacks were Houston, TX (73 attacks), Chicago, IL (59), Los Angeles, CA (54), Cleveland, OH (46) and Denver, CO (44).

Most dog attack reports are minor, but some involve serious injuries. And even when we think we are safe, a dog attack can surprise us.

In April of last year, **Michael Benson** of Kansas City, KS Branch 499 was delivering on his route in the city and knocked on the door at the house of a customer he knew often had outgoing packages. The customer's daughter answered the door with the family's pit bull next to her.

The dog "was not happy to see me," Benson said, and lunged at him. As carriers are trained to do, Benson put his satchel between his body and the dog. "Unfortunately, my dog spray was on my satchel," Benson said, so he could not reach it. When Benson fell to the ground, the dog latched its jaws on his arm and wouldn't let go—until

it bit his face. The dog released Benson when he screamed, and an adult came to the door and pulled the dog away.

Luckily, his injuries were not severe. Benson had several stitches and plastic surgery for the wounds on his face and lost a few days of work, and he has fully recovered. He recommends that carriers be wary of open doors and have their dog spray at the ready in an easily accessible place. He now carries two dog sprays.

The Postal Service helps carriers avoid bad encounters with dogs by giving advice in training sessions, stand-up talks and written material, as well as by providing dog spray, dog warning cards, and notifications in scanners to alert carriers of dangerous dogs at certain addresses.

To enhance the warning cards, USPS is experimenting with warning stickers as part of its "Dog Paw" pilot program. Any letter carrier who knows of a dog on his or her route that may pose a threat can post one of two warning stickers on a mailbox. A yellow paw sticker warns that there may be such a dog at the next home on the route; an orange sticker (consistent with the orange color of dog warning cards) means there is a threatening dog at that address.

The dog paw stickers were rolled out in North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana as a pilot program last November.

New carriers who don't have experience dealing with dogs and who may not be familiar with the dogs located on their routes are especially vulnerable to dog attacks, NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Letter carriers who are still learning the job have so many things to remember, but they shouldn't forget the threat of dog



bites," he said. "Knowing where the dogs are is important, but you also need to know what to do when you encounter a dog."

Whether or not you are warned in advance of a dangerous dog, here are some dos and don'ts for avoiding dog trouble on your route:

- Do check for dog warning cards, carry dog spray and keep an eye out for dogs at all times.
- Don't run past a dog. The dog's natural instinct is to chase people who run.
- Don't scream if a dog threatens you. Avoid eye contact. Try to remain still until the dog leaves, and then back away slowly until the dog is out of sight.
- Don't approach an unfamiliar dog, especially one that's tethered or confined.
- Do try to place something between yourself and the dog, such as a satchel or backpack, if a dog threatens to attack.
- Do report it to a supervisor if you observe a potentially dangerous situation involving a dog, or if you are attacked or threatened by one. **PR**