

Who let the dog out?

The love-hate relationship between mail carriers and neighborhood dogs has long been the subject of many cartoons, jokes and social media memes. While the authors of these comedic bits may not mean any harm, dog attacks on letter carriers are no joking matter. New carriers need to learn how to protect themselves from dogs, but experienced carriers also may need to refresh their memories and remain vigilant. 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.

The number of dog attacks reported by letter carriers on their routes increased last year, as is typically the case, and the Postal Service is continuing its efforts to help carriers avoid bites. Last month, USPS held its annual Dog Bite Awareness Campaign to focus on the dangers dogs can present to letter carriers. This year's theme, "Secure Your Dog, Keep Deliveries on Track" focused on educating dog owners about the dangers their dogs can present to letter carriers. During the campaign, USPS provided customers with information on how to keep their dogs away from carriers on their routes, along with reminders that mail and package delivery service could be suspended if they fail to secure their dog.

According to USPS statistics released on May 29, there were more than 6,000 incidents involving dog attacks on Postal Service employees last year, compared to 5,800 dog bite incidents reported in the previous year. The top five cities for dog attacks in 2024 were Los Angeles, CA (77), Houston, TX (65), Chicago, IL (57), St. Louis, MO (47) and Cincinnati, OH (44). USPS also reports

that the top five states with the greatest number of dog bite incidents were California (701), Texas (438), Ohio (350), Illinois (344) and New York (322).

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. 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 that a barrier will keep a dog from reaching you. Dogs can jump over fences, break through screens, and even crash right through glass windows and doors while trying to get to a letter carrier to attack them.

Dogs are more likely to bite when you aren't looking—so keep your attention on any dog as long as you can, without staring. 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 to chase you, not to mention that you might fall, which could not only injure you but also make you more vulnerable to the dog. Put 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 customer who owns a threatening dog moves to a new home, many carriers forward the dog warning card to the station that services the new address to protect their co-workers.

Also, make sure that a hazard alert is entered into the system so that the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) will notify you and other letter carriers that there is a dangerous dog in the area. Once the hazard alert has been programmed, the MDD will emit an audible and visual warning as you approach the address to forewarn you that a dog is present at that location. The dog warning card and the MDD alert are two important ways to help keep carriers safe.

Keep in mind that if a dog is such a threat that the mail can't be delivered without serious risk, you should tell your supervisor. If a carrier feels threatened by a dog, or if a dog is loose or unleashed, the owner may be asked to pick up mail at a post office until the carrier is assured that the pet has been restrained. If a dog is roaming the neighborhood, the pet owner's neighbors also may be asked to pick up their mail at the area's post office. USPS can

suspend mail delivery to any address where there is danger to a carrier.

Carriers need to always stay aware of their surroundings and to keep an eye out for places where dogs might 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 can't hear them, so be sure to leave your earbuds



and headphones behind.

Whether or not you are warned in advance of a dangerous dog, here are some “do’s 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. A dog’s natural instinct is to chase people who run.
- Don’t scream if a dog threatens you. Avoid direct 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 hold something between yourself and the dog, such as a satchel or a parcel, 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.

Being a letter carrier is challenging, and the job is ever-changing. But one thing is certain: Carriers will encounter dogs on their routes. Make sure you do everything you can to protect yourself, as you are the most important delivery. **PR**

Staying safe in the sun and heat

Letter carriers work many hours out in the sun, and that exposes them to two health risks—one that can strike quickly and another that can injure slowly.

Heat: an immediate danger

Extreme heat can cause death quickly, and it has taken the lives of letter carriers on the job. One of the latest carriers to succumb to heat was **Eugene Gates Jr.**, a member of Branch 132 in Dallas, TX, who collapsed in a customer’s yard from the heat on June 20, 2023 and soon died.

Heat can affect anyone, no matter their age or physical shape. It’s not a matter of being tough and enduring the heat. Letter carriers need to take care of their body’s needs and prepare in advance. The risk is greater for those who haven’t acclimated to working in the heat, so new carriers and carriers returning from leave should take extra

precautions.

Preparation is the secret to staying safe. Water is essential to the body’s natural cooling process, so drink plenty of H₂O long before you leave the office, and continue to drink throughout the day to replace vital bodily fluids, including electrolytes, which keep your metabolism in working order. Check with your doctor on the best way to replenish your electrolytes.

The other way to prepare for a hot day is to choose whichever uniform clothing items you can find that are appropriate for hot weather. Wear loose-fitting, breathable clothing to allow your skin to cool itself. Light-colored fabric reflects more sun and keeps you cooler. Studies have shown that sun exposure can cause brain dysfunction just by heating your head, so a hat is a must.

After you take precautions, be ready for trouble if the heat catches up with

you. On your route, make a plan for places to take refuge if you get overheated. Look for shady areas and air-conditioned public spaces you can use to cool down, especially at midday through mid-afternoon, when the heat peaks.

This year, USPS sent a Heat Illness Prevention Program mailer to your home. You can find a copy at the NALC’s website atnalc.org/workplace-issues/safety-and-health/body/2025-03-06-Heat-Illness-Prevention-Publication-Final-002.pdf.

The last page of that material advises you to “Take breaks to cool down as needed.”

Know the danger signs of heat. You should be prepared to recognize the two kinds of severe heat stress:

- **Heat exhaustion** symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, weakness, thirst and heavy sweating. You should call

Staying safe in the heat (continued)

for medical help before this becomes a heat stroke.

- **Heat stroke** is the most serious heat-related illness and requires immediate medical attention. Call 911 immediately and, if possible, have someone contact your supervisor. Do not wait for your supervisor's approval to call 911. Symptoms include confusion; fainting; seizures, very high body temperature; hot, dry skin; and profuse sweating. The visible signs of heat stroke are red, hot, dry skin, or excessive sweating, seizures and fainting.

Take action immediately when you recognize the signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke, whether in yourself or in a colleague. Find shade or a cool place indoors, drink water and call 911 immediately. Then notify your supervisor if you can.

"Enduring the discomfort of heat may be part of the job, but risking your health is not," NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. said. "Don't ever hesitate to protect yourself."

To help outdoor workers survive the heat, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have jointly developed a heat safety tool (app) for your smartphone. Once the app is installed, it can detect your location and provide you with the current temperature, humidity and heat index—the combination of temperature and humidity that tells you how difficult it will be for your body to cool itself. The app also will provide the expected heat index for the day so you can plan for it.

You can find the app for download to



your Android device or iPhone at [osha.gov/heat/heat-app](https://www.osha.gov/heat/heat-app).

Sunburn and sun exposure: a long-term risk

Even on a cool day, the sun's radiation is a threat to your skin. Severe sunburn can be very painful and even knock you off your route for a day or more. But even without burning your skin, long-term exposure to sunlight increases the risk of skin cancer. Letter carriers should take precautions daily to minimize the risk of both sunburn and long-term skin damage from cumulative exposure to the sun's rays.

"Skin damage due to long-term exposure can be a serious problem later in life," Peralta said. "Protect yourself every day so it doesn't add up."

Use a strong sunscreen on all exposed skin, even on cloudy days, and reapply as needed. Consider the

sun protection factor (SPF) of the sunscreen you use. SPF is a multiplier of how long the sunscreen allows you to be in the sun without burning. For example, on a sunny day when you might suffer a sunburn in 15 minutes with no protection, a sunscreen rated at SPF 30 would theoretically protect you for seven hours (15 minutes times 30)—as long as sweat doesn't wash it away sooner. Sunscreen does wear off, so keep a supply handy and reapply as needed.

When you can, wear appropriate clothes to cover as much of your skin as possible. Remember that the sun's rays can go through some types of fabric, so consider wearing uniform items made for sun protection and applying sunscreen under a shirt or hat just to be safe.

"Stay safe from heat and sun," Peralta said, "and look out for each other." **PR**