

Sally Webster is East Devon's Principal EHO with responsibility for dog control. With lots of new and inexperienced dog owners now living in and visiting our towns and villages, here Sally is offering some advice about responsible dog ownership, suggesting how dog owners can do the right thing and telling us all how to stay on the right side of the law.

Owning a dog involves responsibilities as well as pleasures and this article will highlight the legal requirements and responsibilities for dog owners.

The following basic tips can help prevent your dog from causing a nuisance:

- Train your dog in elementary obedience, so that it is under control at all times
- Make sure your dog is identified, it is a legal requirement for dogs to wear a collar and tag (in a public place), and to be microchipped.
- It is now a legal requirement in East Devon to always keep your dog on a lead on roads and on pavements next to roads. You should also keep your dog on a lead where there are other animals, for example when walking on a footpath through a field containing livestock.
- Make sure that your garden is properly fenced so that your dog can't escape. Never let your dog out on its own, but take it for properly controlled exercise.
- Always carry a bag you can use to pick up after your dog. Take the waste home to your black rubbish bin or sack or use a litter or dog waste bin. Even better, train your dog to 'go at home'.
- Don't let your dog bark constantly a well-trained dog is not one that barks at everyone and everything. Dogs that are kept outside for long periods often bark more. Find out when and why your dog barks and take steps to prevent it. We can give advice in the worst cases
- Don't leave your dog alone for long periods; dogs are pack animals and need companionship. Remember - you have a duty of care under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
- Keep your dog healthy, with regular feeding, worming, exercise, grooming and vaccinations. Make sure your dog has bedding which is clean, warm and dry and that fresh drinking water is always available
- Never leave your dog alone in a hot car, they can become dehydrated and even die in a very short time

It is against the law to let a dog be dangerously out of control anywhere, such as:

- in a public place
- in a private place, for example a neighbour's house or garden
- in the owner's home

The law applies to all dogs.

Your dog is considered dangerously out of control if it:

- injures someone
- makes someone worried that it might injure them

A court could also decide that your dog is dangerously out of control if either of the following apply:

- it attacks someone's animal
- the owner of an animal thinks they could be injured if they tried to stop your dog attacking their animal

A farmer is allowed to kill your dog if it is worrying their livestock.

You can get an unlimited fine or be sent to prison for up to 6 months (or both) if your dog is dangerously out of control. You may not be allowed to own a dog in the future and your dog may be destroyed.

If you let your dog injure someone you can be sent to prison for up to 5 years or fined (or both). If you deliberately use your dog to injure someone you could be charged with 'malicious wounding'.

If you allow your dog to kill someone you can be sent to prison for up to 14 years or get an unlimited fine (or both).

If you allow your dog to injure an assistance dog (for example a guide dog) you can be sent to prison for up to 3 years or fined (or both).

Some public areas in England and Wales are covered by Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) - previously called Dog Control Orders (DCOs).

In public areas with PSPOs, you may have to:

- keep your dog on a lead
- put your dog on a lead if told to by a police officer, police community support officer or someone from the council
- stop your dog going to certain places - like farmland or parts of a park
- limit the number of dogs you have with you (this applies to professional dog walkers too)
- clear up after your dog
- carry a poop scoop and disposable bags

If you ignore a PSPO, you can be fined:

- £100 on the spot (a 'Fixed Penalty Notice')
- up to £1,000 if it goes to court

Further information relating to the East Devon PSPO'S can be found on the EDDC website (www.eastdevon.gov.uk/publicspacesprotectionorders).

Further information concerning dog issues can also be found on the East Devon District Council website, www.eastdevon.gov.uk

Alternatively advice can be obtained from the council by contacting the Environmental Health team using the Report It facility on our website, by calling on 01395 517456 or by emailing environmentalhealth@eastdevon.gov.uk