

Dangerous Dog Orders - Does rehabilitating training work?

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Recent changes to the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995, has allowed for "Dangerous Dog Orders" to incorporate mandatory and specific training for the owner and the offending dog to be completed.

This training program has been developed specifically to assist in the prevention of further attacks by the dog, and to provide the owner with greater understanding and knowledge of dog behaviour.

With assistance, this programs structure was developed and adopted by the Dog and Cat Management Board. To date there are three authorised training providers in South Australia that facilitate this training.

The program educates the owners of offending dogs and provides them with the knowledge and tools on how to prevent situations arising that gave cause to the Order being placed in the first instance. The program also includes the requirement for a blood test to be undertaken.

Once an Order is placed on a dog, the owner and any other person responsible for it, must comply with specific condition and/or directions. They are –

- The dog must wear a muzzle so as to prevent it from biting when off its property,
- it must remain on a leash, not greater than two metres, at all times when off its property,
- it must be desexed, within a specified timeframe,
- it must be microchipped,
- the dog must be contained in an enclosure whilst on its property, and
- it must complete a Dangerous Dog Training course.

If the owner breaches or fails to comply with any of the above conditions, or any additional direction given by the Council, the owner will be in breach of the Order and may be prosecuted. If this occurs, the Council is likely to seek a Destruction Order and have the offending dog destroyed.

When an Animal Management Officer is investigating a serious attack, guided by the Incident Severity Scale, they should advise the owner/s that an Order may be placed on the dog. If they fail to comply with the Order, serious penalties may apply - up to \$2,500.

As the Dog and Cat Management Board have approved this program, it provides the owner with natural justice and a second chance to keep their dog.

If the owner/s is/are genuine and willing to comply with any Orders, they must take into consideration the financial implications before making a final decision.

Desexing a dog	\$300 to \$500
Microchipping	\$30
Muzzle	\$30
Dangerous Dog Collar	\$20
Dangerous Dog Signs	\$15 each
Construct enclosure	\$500 to \$2000
Blood tests	\$200
Dangerous Dog Training	\$600 to \$1000

(These are figures are approximates and will vary with the individual circumstances.)

Compliance to the order can cause large financial burdens on any household. If any of the above are not complied with or completed, within a reasonable timeframe, it will be deemed a breach of the Order and the person/s named in the Order may be prosecuted.

In most cases, the offending dog will have some sort of history with the Council for breaches of the Dog and Cat Management Act. Wandering at large and minor attack/harassments are common. Unless behaviour modification is applied at this point, it is likely the unruly behaviour will continue and an innocent person or animal will suffer as a direct result of the owner's inability to control what their dog does and whom it affects.

The Dangerous Dog Training program, in conjunction with the other conditions, is a great tool to convince the owner that they are not a responsible owner and that they should not own this specific dog. An investigating officer should ask the owners to surrender their dog so as to prevent another innocent person or animal from being attacked or possibly killed. Highlighting the financial implications and what will happen, if they not comply, should convince the majority of dog owners to surrender their dog. If an Order is placed on a dog and it attacks again, the maximum penalty is doubled as it is seen to be an Aggravated attack. When dealing with the owner/s, be honest, open and transparent and you will get a reasonable answer.

If the owner is willing to commit financially and to the training, the resulting educated dog and owner should be able to coexist in society without affecting anyone's lives or safety.

Motivating the owner/s to be responsible and make informed decisions on how to comply with the Order is a difficult task. Various skills and negotiating techniques must be utilised in order to achieve an appropriate outcome. The desired outcome should include what the Council deems appropriate as well as the owner and the victim in some cases.

It is the Animal Management Officer's duty to ensure compliance to legislation and to provide a safe and secure community. People, dogs and other animals have the right to live safely and without the threat of harm. Both current and future risks, to the community, need to be assessed and controlled in the best possible manner.

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