



Colorado Springs Police Department

General Order

1086 Interactions Involving Domesticated Dogs

Section 1000 – Patrol Functions

Effective Date: 4/15/2024

Supersedes Date: 11/22/2021

.01 Purpose

The purpose of this directive is to provide guidance in situations involving domesticated dogs, to include awareness of common canine behaviors and **response** considerations.

.02 Cross Reference

[GO 1620 Enhanced Tactical Communications System](#)

[DL-1086-01 Animal Situations](#)

.03 Discussion

In 2013 and in response to several high-profile law enforcement shootings involving dogs, the Colorado State Legislature enacted the Dog Protection Act, C.R.S. § 29-5-112. The act seeks to provide additional training to law enforcement officers to prevent shootings involving dogs.

.04 Policy

Lethal action involving a vicious/dangerous dog will be guided by one's self-defense and the defense/safety of others.

Officers who use or attempt to use a firearm against a vicious/dangerous dog must be able to articulate a belief that the canine posed a threat of bodily injury to themselves or another.

.05 Definitions

Hackle - Erectile hairs along the back of a dog or other animal that rise when it is angry or alarmed.

.10 Canine Behavior

To ensure officers utilize the appropriate response, officers will be aware of the following canine behaviors.

Barking

A dog's behavior is not always indicative of a threat, nor does it mean a dog is aggressive. If the dog is contained, barking tells officers that the dog is protecting their owner/property and they want others to know it. Barking reflects the dog's territorial and protective instincts.

Postures

<i>Baseline Posture</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head held high• Ears are up but not forward• Tail is down• Mouth is relaxed	<i>Alert Posture</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head held high• Ears are forward• Tail out behind the dog• Mouth is closed• Feet firmly planted
<i>Defensive Threat Posture</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Body is lowered• Pupils are dilated• Corners of the mouth are pulled back (teeth bared)• Nose is wrinkled• Ears are back• Hackles are up• Tail is tucked between the legs	<i>Offensive Threat Posture</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hackles are up• Tail is up and stiff• Ears are forward• Nose is wrinkled• Corners of the mouth are forward• Tall posture over the toes

A dog yawning is widely recognized as a sign of stress or anxiety. A dog yawning should be considered a warning that the dog is not comfortable with the environment.

Officers should also be aware of non-social, "stand-offish" behavior, such as freezing in response to a touch. A look followed by direct intense eye contact back from the dog is another clear sign that they may bite.

A dog showing its teeth is in defensive drive. The dog will look intimidating, and one might think that because it is growling, barking, with its lips up showing teeth that the dog is preparing to attack. The dog may even lunge and step back. In fact, this type of behavior is fear. Such a dog is

scared, and it does not want to attack, as much as scare the person away. If ignored, the dog will most likely leave you alone. If pushed, the dog will likely bite out of fear.

Dog bites are always preceded by behavior an astute observer can use as a warning and then take steps to reduce the dog's stress or fear. This includes the ears being pinned back, the hackles standing up, and an ability to see the whites of their eyes.

.15 Reasons Dogs Bite

[Law Enforcement Dog Encounters Training \(LEDET\): A Toolkit for Law Enforcement](#) identifies four main trigger groups associated with dog bite situations. This includes fear/defense, territory/resource protection, social conflict resolution, and predation.

- *Fear/defense response:* A dog presented with a perceived threat has three options for obtaining safety and survival: freeze, flight, or fight.
 - Flight or running away is usually the most effective and primary choice. An animal, canine or otherwise, that runs away and avoids a threat will live another day.
 - Freeze, if flight is perceived as risky, a dog may freeze in place to avoid drawing attention, hoping the perceived threat will continue past without noticing them.
 - Fight is usually reserved as a last option. An animal that fights may survive that encounter but may be injured to the level that it can no longer adequately compete with other organisms and thus loses survival advantage.
- *Protection of territory/resources:* An animal's territory is usually a place of safety, refuge from danger, and may contain resources for survival, such as food, water, and shelter. Another animal entering the territory, or one perceived as a potential competitor for resources, may be confronted aggressively to limit the incursion or competition.
- *Social conflict response:* Social conflict resolution, sometimes referred to as "dominance," is a factor in dog-dog conflict, but is rarely the basis for human-dog conflict. Although any other animal, including humans, may be seen as a threat or a competitor for food and shelter, dogs do not perceive humans as if they are dogs. We do not smell, look, or act correctly to be seen as other dogs.
- *Predation response:* The balance of potential risk and energy expenditure versus the nutritional value of smaller, easier targets usually limits predation behavior unless the human is very small (infants particularly), elderly, or otherwise impaired. Victim profiles of fatal dog attacks on humans show that the most common victims are small children, followed by the elderly.

.20 Non-Verbal Indicators Involving Domesticated Dogs

Much like humans, dogs are keenly aware of non-verbal indicators. This includes an officer's posture and physical actions. When interacting with dogs, officers should be aware of the

importance of body posture. Those who stands/walks tall will be perceived as being in charge. An officer who steps away from a dog that is demonstrating aggressive behaviors reinforces the dog's belief that they are in charge. While difficult, officers should focus on standing their ground to avoid the dog perceiving that they are in charge or contributing towards a dog's predation drive.

Dogs react to movement, so keep actions slow and non-threatening. Touching the owner, even appearing to do so, can provoke hostility from the dog.

.25 Owner Access to a Dog

In situations that do **not** jeopardize an officer's safety or the safety of another, officers will give a dog's owner/responsible person the opportunity to control the dog and remove it from the immediate area prior to officer contact. One such consideration in this area may include requesting the presence of a humane society officer.

Mitigating factors officers should consider when determining the feasibility of giving a dog owner/responsible person access to the dog includes:

- Information indicating the dog has been documented on a Dangerous Dog Registry, in accordance with C.R.S. § 35-42-115. Local information about such an animal is available by contacting the Pikes Peak Area Humane Society at 719-473-1011.
- The location where the dog is being kept is known to be used to traffic or manufacture narcotics.
- The presence of information asserting a person has been bitten by a dog or is likely in physical danger because of the dog's presence.

.30 Tool Selection Considerations

Tool selection is an important consideration to successful resolution of a dog encounter. Examples of tools officers can consider include:

- *Verbal Commands* - Look directly at the dog and in a loud and firm voice state, "No" or "Down." Be aware that dogs are unpredictable; even if it does initially retreat, it may still attack. For that reason, officers must have a secondary plan to address a secondary attack from the dog.
- *Snare/Control Pole* – In situations where officers can plan for an encounter involving a dog, officers should consider contacting representatives from the humane society to assist. If available, officers should consider using a snare/control pole to control the dog.

- *CO2 Fire Extinguishers* – CO2 based fire extinguishers like those found many households provide a less lethal option in dog encounters. The household spray tastes/smells bad, is cold, and it creates a disorienting cloud around the dog.
- *OC spray* – While deploying department issued OC may be helpful, in some situations the dog can become more aggressive. Officers should have a lethal **weapon** option present when deploying OC.
- *Taser* – While a Taser may incapacitate a dog, officers should be aware that the smaller target area most dogs have decreases the effectiveness of the device. While discouraged, the use of the Taser is not explicitly prohibited.
- *Lethal action*– The use of lethal **action** is authorized, so long as the officer objectively believes they or another is at risk of bodily injury.

The use of hands and feet to strike a hostile dog is not recommended given the increased likelihood the dog will be able to bite the officer or pull them off balance.

.32 Attacks by Domestic Dogs against an Animal

While not the primary focus of the department, officers may encounter situations, in which a domestic dog attacks an animal. These types of situations present a unique risk when considering the dog’s unpredictable movements and the possibility that a dog’s response could transition from the animal to humans. Officers can use the tools available to them to end a dog attack on an animal so long as the officers prioritize the protection of human life.

.35 Reporting Requirements

Officer Responsibilities

The following reporting guidelines will be used when an officer **uses or attempts to use a firearm** against a vicious/dangerous dog:

- Notify an on-duty supervisor of the event.
- The involved officer will complete a MFR Case Report titled ordinance 6.7.108 Dangerous Animals or C.R.S. § 18-9-204.5 Dangerous Dog.
 - The report will include details of the on-scene investigation, to include interviews with witnesses; ensuring digital photographs are taken and placed into DIMS, and the disposition of the dog/dog’s remains. Officers will also articulate the specific behaviors observed prior to the encounter-taking place (as outlined in .10 Dog Behavior, above).
- The officer will notify the humane society to determine if there is a need to quarantine the dog (e.g., rabies testing).

- If the humane society does not want the dog for quarantine, the officer will release the dog(s) remains to the owner/responsible party.
- Officers should consider making an arrest if probable cause exists.
- Each officer who uses or attempts to use a firearm against a vicious/dangerous dog will complete a BlueTeam entry titled *Firearm Discharge*. Officers will articulate the specific behaviors observed leading up to **their actions** (as outlined in .10 Dog Behavior, above).

Supervisor Responsibilities

- A supervisor will respond to the scene.
- (REDACTED)
- Notifications will be made through the chain-of-command to the division commander or staff duty officer and to the Public Information Office.
- The responding supervisor will review the involved officer(s) BlueTeam and will make recommendations in accordance with established BlueTeam protocols.
 - The entry will be reviewed through the deputy chief of the officer's assigned bureau.
- In the event an employee sustains a dog bite, the responding supervisor will coordinate providing the officer with the appropriate level of medical treatment. The supervisor will also ensure a *Preliminary Accident Report* is completed.

Unlike with a use or attempted use a firearm involving a person, officers involved in similar situations with a dog are not required to be placed on restricted duty.