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Letter Carriers Delivering in Nation's 'Dog Bite Capital' to Kick-off National Dog Bite Prevention Week

WASHINGTON – Thirty-three hundred letter carriers were bitten by dogs last year, yet that pales in comparison to the other 4.7 million Americans who were needlessly victimized by dog attacks—nearly half of whom were children. To raise awareness that dog bites are a nationwide issue rather than a postal problem, the Postal Service kicks off National Dog Bite Prevention Week on Sunday, May 15, in the letter carrier dog bite “capital” of the nation—the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

“Two fables we often hear in the Postal Service,” explained Mike Spates, Acting Vice President and Consumer Advocate, “is the check’s in the mail, and don’t worry, my dog won’t bite. The truth is, any dog can bite, no matter how cute it is.”

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the Humane Society of the United States, small children, the elderly and Postal Service letter carriers—in that order—are the most frequent victims of dog attacks. Nationally, children suffer more than two million incidents every year.

The AVMA reports that dog bites in the United States requiring medical attention number 500,000 to 800,000 annually. Countless more go unreported and untreated. On average, about a dozen people die each year from dog bites. Dog bites can also result in criminal and civil liability for pet owners. Over the past 15 years, more than half the states have passed laws with stiff penalties for owners of dogs who cause serious injury or death. The Insurance Information Institute estimates that insurance companies pay out roughly \$345.5 million in dog bite liability claims annually.

Los Angeles area letter carriers were victimized by 204 dog bite attacks last year. Cleveland letter carriers suffered 94 bites; Houston 81; and Oakland with 76 are metropolitan areas with the next highest number of letter-carrier dog bites.

Many attacks occur at the customer’s doorstep.

“When our letter carrier comes to your home, keep your dog inside, away from the door, in another room, or on a leash,” Spates added. “Before opening the door, we ask that customers place their pet in another room, as many dogs have been known to jump through screen doors.”

Customers who fail to restrain their pets run the risk of curtailed delivery. In many cases this also includes their neighbors, who may also have to pick up their mail at the Post Office.

“We place the safety of our postal family as paramount,” Spates continued. “If our letter carriers feel threatened, we will suspend delivery until we deem it safe.”

Spates will offer additional tips during Sunday’s 10 a.m. PDT ceremony at the Warner Center Park, 5888 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Woodland Hills, CA. Letter carriers will pose “chorus-line style” displaying their dog bite scars before they start a “dog walk-a-thon” rally. Postal employees and their families will lead the walk carrying signs and banners calling for responsible pet ownership.

Representatives from the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Humane Society of Southern California will be on-hand to offer dog bite prevention tips and speak about responsible pet ownership (see attachment).

“Seventy percent of all dog bites occur on the dog owner’s property,” said Dr. Bernadette Cruz, Companion Animal Practitioner, American Veterinary Medical Association. “A dog that attacks is very often the family pet. Reducing dog bites requires responsible pet ownership. Dog owners must understand the importance of appropriate behavioral training and supervision of contact between their dog and children or strangers. Education is the key to solving an issue that’s reaching epidemic proportions,” she added.

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. An independent federal agency, the Postal Service makes deliveries to more than 142 million addresses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of \$69 billion, it is the world’s leading provider of mail and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. Moreover, today’s postage rates will remain stable until at least 2006. The U.S. Postal Service delivers more than 46 percent of the world’s mail volume—some 206 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year—and serves seven million customers each day at its 37,000 retail locations nationwide.

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Dog Bite Prevention Background

The Victims

- The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) reports that small children, the elderly and letter carriers—in that order—are the most frequent victims. Dog attacks are the most commonly reported childhood public health problem in the United States.
- The AVMA and HSUS also report that the number of dog attacks exceeds the reported instances of measles, whooping cough and mumps, combined. Dog bite victims account for up to 5 percent of emergency room visits.
- Many of the bites that were reported by 3,300 letter carriers last year came from dogs whose owners said they would not bite.

How to Avoid Being Bitten

- Don't run past a dog. The dog's natural instinct is to chase and catch prey.
- If a dog threatens you, don't scream. Avoid eye contact. Try to remain motionless until the dog leaves, then back away slowly until the dog is out of sight.
- Don't approach a strange dog, especially one that's tethered or confined.
- While letter carriers are discouraged from petting animals, people who choose to pet dogs should always let a dog see and sniff them before petting the animal.

How to Be a Responsible Dog Owner

- Obedience training can teach dogs proper behavior and help owners control their dog in any situation.
- When the letter carrier comes to your home, keep your dog inside, away from the door in another room.
- Don't let your child take mail from the letter carrier in the presence of your dog. Your dog's instinct is to protect the family.
- Spay or neuter your dog. Neutered dogs are less likely to bite. HSUS statistics reflect that dogs that have not been spayed or neutered are up to three times more likely to be involved in a biting incident than neutered or spayed dogs.
- Dogs that haven't been properly socialized, receive little attention or handling or are left tied up for long periods of time frequently turn into biters.

NOTE: Additional information on preventing dog bites can be found at <http://avma.org/pubhlth/dogbite/default.asp>, www.nodogbites.org and at <http://www.preventthebite.com/resources.htm>.

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