

Q. When was the Animal Ordinance adopted?

A. The Animal ordinance was first adopted in September of 2001 and has since been amended several times, usually in response to changes in state law. We adopted this ordinance a few months after I took office and it was in response to a horrific dog attack on a child in Union County. With the help of a volunteer committee at the time, we were able to come up with a very good ordinance that has stood the test of time, with just a few adjustments.

Q. What is considered a “dangerous” dog?

A. As defined in the ordinance, a dangerous dog is any dog that:

- Causes a substantial puncture of a person’s skin by teeth without causing serious injury; provided, however, that a nip, scratch, or abrasion shall not be sufficient to classify a dog as dangerous under this paragraph.
- Aggressively attacks in a manner that causes a person to reasonably believe that the dog posed an imminent threat of serious injury to a person although no such injury occurs; provided, however, that the acts of barking, growling, or showing of teeth by a dog shall not be sufficient to classify a dog as dangerous under this paragraph.
- While off the owner’s property, kills a pet animal;

Q. What is considered a “vicious” dog?

A. A vicious dog means a dog that inflicts serious injury or death on a person or causes serious injury to a person resulting from reasonable attempts to escape from the dog’s attack or is owned, possessed, kept, harbored, trained, or maintained for the purpose of fighting.

Q. Who determines if a dog is dangerous or vicious?

A. The animal control officer will make such investigations and inquiries as may be necessary to identify and classify dangerous and vicious dogs.

Q. What happens after a dog is declared dangerous or vicious?

A. When a dangerous or vicious dog is classified as such by the animal control officer, the officer will notify the owner in writing within 72 hours of such classification. The notice will include a form to request a hearing. The owners of the dogs classified as dangerous and vicious will be expected to be issued citations for nuisance and/or failure to exercise reasonable care. The animal control officer may also immediately impound the dog pending compliance with this chapter.

Q. Who is responsible for enforcing the Animal Ordinance?

A. Enforcement of this ordinance is the responsibility of the Union County Sheriff's Office who has assigned two deputies to animal control duties. They both have experience in this area and do an excellent job. If you are on Facebook you can "like" them and get daily updates on their activities. They post updates on lost and found animals and make every effort to reunite pets with their owners. If you need to call them their number is 706-439-6052. As they are out in the field much of the time you may need to leave a message which they will respond to.

Q. Does Union County have a leash law?

A. No, our ordinance does not require sterilized animals be kept on a leash. However, it is the duty of every owner to exercise reasonable care and take all necessary steps and precautions to protect other people and property from injuries and damage which might result from an animal's behavior. Every animal must be restrained or controlled so as to prevent it from chasing vehicles or chasing, menacing, attacking or biting or injuring persons or other animals, or barking excessively.

Q. What about unsterilized animals. Are they allowed to run loose?

A. No, they are not. Every owner of an unsterilized dog, cat or ferret, is required to confine the animal at all times. Any time an unsterilized animal is not confined, the animal must be on a secure and sturdy leash while being walked by a responsible person. Any unsterilized animal that is unconfined or not on a leash is subject to citation, confiscation and impoundment, and, in addition to being subject to citation, the owner will be required to have the animal sterilized within 30 days. The burden is on the owner of a sterilized animal to have proof available that the animal is sterilized.

Q. Are there any exceptions to the ordinance pertaining to unsterilized animals?

A. Yes. Unsterilized working animals (including show dogs) are exempt from the above confinement requirements while working, but their owners are required to keep such animals under control. The burden is on the owners to prove the animal was working at the time of the citation. Owners who negligently allow working animals to roam and run free at any time are subject to citation and sterilization under this ordinance.

Q. What is considered a working dog?

A. Working dog means and includes, but is not limited to, seeing eye dogs; certified guard dogs; working cattle dogs; dogs whose primary function is hunting; and dogs which compete in conformation, agility or obedience competitions.

