

## SHERIFF'S COLUMN

SEPT. 12, 2011

### When "Man's best friend" Doesn't Live Up To Their Reputation

Recently I received a call from a bicycle enthusiast who told me he enjoyed riding the hills and viewing the scenic beauty of Richland County but he felt unsafe at times because of loose dogs confronting him on the roadway.

The caller expressed his disappointment that some citizens choose to ignore the county's leash laws and allow their dogs to threaten his safety while he is legally proceeding down a country road. He wanted to know what more could be done to protect him and many others who ride, run, jog or walk along our rural roadways who are suddenly confronted by an excitable or angry or dangerous dog. He suggested that covering this topic in my next column could inform the citizens about the error of their ways.

I agreed that discussing this issue is a good idea because we have a lot of runners, joggers, walkers, and bicyclists using our county roads every day and I remember as a young boy while riding my bike to school in Green Bay I was routinely chased by dogs along the route. I remember trying to avoid being bitten by the dogs running at me and the anxiety these unleashed dogs created in me way back when. Of course I'm a little older now but it still seems this issue continues to be a problem in our communities.

In Richland County there is an ordinance prohibiting dog owners from allowing dogs to "run at large". "At large" according to this ordinance means a dog that is "off the premises of its owner and not under the control of the owner or some other person." In other words, whoever is supervising the dog is responsible to maintain control over their dog at all times to ensure that the dog does not leave the property.

When we at the sheriff's department receive a complaint about a dog running at large a deputy is dispatched to investigate the incident and determine what occurred. Sometimes the deputy finds that after talking with the dog's owner and there are no injuries involved in the reported incident, a written warning

will take care of the problem. If a warning is issued by the deputy the warning is "logged" at the sheriff's department and a "shift briefing" is issued to the other deputies so that numerous warnings are not given for the same dog or at the same location. If the matter is found to be a repeat violation or a more serious incident a county ordinance violation citation is issued.

The fines for allowing a dog to "run at large" in violation of the county ordinance are not inexpensive. The first offense fine is \$263.53 and a second charge and each charge after the first is \$389.50 for each incident. In addition to the ordinance citations issued, there is also the cost of personal liability associated with injuries caused by an unleashed dog.

While it is true that most of the "dogs running at large" complaints we receive at the sheriff's department do not involve dogs actively chasing a bicyclist or jogger (mostly they involve the neighbor's dog that is not tied up is on my property) this fact does not diminish the very serious dangers that do exist to the operator of a bicycle or a motorcycle or a jogger who is legally and safely trying to navigate their way down a road. They have a right to expect that they can do this safely without being attacked by "Mans best friend."

If you are looking for tips on what to do when confronted by a dog on the roadway you can go on the internet and find several web sites that list safety tips and show you how to stay safe when confronted by a dog as you walk, jog, or bike. You can also call the appropriate law enforcement agency and report the dog running loose on the roadway. In Richland County a deputy will be assigned to investigate why that dog is running loose without a leash on the road.

Many of you own a dog or numerous dogs. Please be a responsible citizen and ensure that your pet is under your control at all times. While you may love your dog and your dog loves you there are no assurances that your dog will treat others who are strangers the same way. By doing your part, the road is safe for everyone who loves to enjoy our county's natural beauty be they walkers, joggers, motorcyclists or bicyclist. Enjoy our Indian Summer and early fall and above all, stay safe.

Sheriff Darrell Berglin