

## My Dog Laws

**Learn how to research federal, state, and local dog laws to find out how they could affect you.**

*Maryann Mott*

In the first seven months of 2007, 42 state bills – and one federal bill – relating to dogs were signed into law, according to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). They range from strengthening animal cruelty and dogfighting laws to including pets in domestic violence orders and disaster evacuation plans.

The recent spike in dog legislation is due, in part, to people taking animal welfare issues more seriously, says Michael Markarian of HSUS.

“Animal protection is becoming part of the public discourse,” he says.

Things tend to move fast in the world of politics. A bill can go from introduction to enactment in less than a week. This is especially true, say experts, at the beginning or near the end of a legislative session.

You can stay abreast of canine bills by visiting several websites that help users quickly locate relevant information. Here are a few to try:

### Federal Dog Laws

In an effort to make federal legislative information freely available to the public, the Library of Congress created the website THOMAS more than a decade ago.

You can search for legislation by word, phrase or bill number.

There’s also a daily summary of activities in both chambers of Congress. And if you need a refresher on how a bill becomes law, you’ll find it there too.

### State Dog Laws

One of the easiest Internet resources on dog legislation to navigate is the Humane Society of the United States’ website.

An interactive map of the country allows you to click on each state for a list of proposed animal legislation. Information includes the bill’s number, sponsor, status (i.e., passed, killed, pending), a brief description, as well as a link to the full text.

Another site to get answers fast is the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The bipartisan organization’s database contains information gleaned from the websites of the 50 state legislatures, the District of Columbia, and territories. Dropdown menus allow users to view specific content such as bills and statutes from all states, one state, or a selected list of states.

### Local Dog Laws

Many municipalities have websites chock-full of information, including laws, upcoming meetings, as well as contact information for elected officials. Use a search engine, like Google or Yahoo, to find your city or county’s website.

Municipal codes regarding dogs are usually posted under the department in charge of enforcing them (i.e., police or animal control). If your community contracts with a local humane society for animal control services, try that organization’s website too.

To stay current on proposed animal ordinances, though, call or visit your city hall or county government offices. Local governments often don’t have the needed resources to update their websites on a timely basis.

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