

Mail Carrier Dog Bite Incidents Decrease Slightly

Three of top five hot spots for dog bite incidents were California cities in 2006.

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The number of mail carriers in the United States that were bitten by dogs decreased last year from the year before, but the number of incidents in California remains higher than in any other state, according to U.S. Postal Service statistics released May 16.

According to the data, the New York metropolitan area recorded no letter carrier dog bites last year. But across the country and at the other end of the scale, the Santa Ana/Orange County, Calif., area led the nation with 96 bitten carriers.

In 2006, a total of 3,184 letter carriers in the U.S. were bitten by dogs, a number down slightly from 3,273 the year before.

However, three of the top five spots for carriers to get bitten were in California: following Santa Ana's 96 dog bites were Houston, with 94; Sacramento, which had 82 dog biting incidents; Los Angeles, with 77; and the Miami/south Florida area, with 71.

After the New York metro area, Alaska was next safest with two dog bites, then Honolulu with three, followed by the states of Maine and Montana, which saw nine dog bites each.

Postal customers can try to introduce their dogs to the regular carrier, but that still leaves the substitute carrier vulnerable. The postal service recommends that owners put their dogs through obedience training to reduce the likelihood of dog biting incidents.

Other dog bite advice from the USPS includes: If a dog threatens you, don't scream. Also, try to avoid eye contact and stay motionless until the dog leaves, then back away slowly until the dog is out of sight. Don't approach a strange dog, particularly ones that are tethered or confined. Don't run past a dog. The dog's natural instinct is to chase and catch prey. If you believe a dog is about to attack you, try to place something between yourself and the dog, such as a backpack or a bicycle. People who choose to pet dogs should always let a dog see and sniff them before petting the animal. When a letter carrier comes to your home, keep your dog inside and away from the door. Don't let children take mail from the letter carrier in the presence of a dog, because the dog's instinct is to protect the family.