

Our Health Our Safety

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NOT ALWAYS OUR BEST FRIEND

Spring is here, and with it an increased risk of dog bites. Every year, hundreds of mail carriers across the country report dog-related incidents. Unfortunately, many mail carriers are permanently scarred by dog attacks that could have been prevented.

In this issue of Our Health Our Safety, we'll talk about some ways to keep those dog attacks at bay. We'll also update you on Canada Post's new methods of dealing with injuries. It's not pretty.



In 2008, Canada Post recorded 554 dog-related incidents.

Atlantic	41
Quebec	63
Huron-Rideau	119
Metro-Toronto	111
Prairies	108
Pacific	102

TOTAL 554

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Canadian Union of Postal Workers

It's important to remember that dogs, even cute little puppies, are animals with a powerful predatory instinct. Most dogs have strong jaws and their sense of smell is 35 times more sensitive than that of humans. Dogs can also hear sounds far beyond the upper limit of human range. They can even detect ultrasounds! Dogs have trouble differentiating between colours but they have a field of vision up to 250°. They are territorial creatures, which means that marking their territory is very important to them. A dog's behaviour can vary enormously, based on the training and attention it gets from its owner. Its behaviour is difficult to predict.

You should always take particular care when encountering dogs. Even if you've been delivering mail at the same address for years and "know" this particular dog, you should bear in mind that it still considers you an intruder when you enter its territory or comfort zone. Dogs can react in different ways: yapping, barking, yelping; wagging their tail, or moving their heads from right to left. Obviously dogs aren't as dangerous when they're tied up as they are when they're running loose. Still, the possibility remains that a dog's tether could break or that you could miscalculate the distance the tied-up dog can reach, so don't take unnecessary risks.

When facing a dog that appears hostile, ask the owner to tie up the dog or bring it inside so there will be no contact between you and the dog. If the owner refuses to remove the dog, or is not around, do not risk your health and safety. You can refuse to deliver the mail at this

address, bring it back to the office and report the incident to your supervisor. If the dog appears threatening, is not tied up and approaches you, avoid abrupt movements. Back up from your line of travel. If the dog attacks you, use dog repellent and try to protect yourself with your satchel. The dog repellent has to be sprayed in the animal's face, which should temporarily halt it and allow you to get away. If you fall down, protect vulnerable parts of your body, such as your throat, face and head.

If you are bitten by a dog, go to a hospital to obtain appropriate care. Dogs can carry fatal diseases such as rabies. Afterwards, report the incident to your supervisor. For urban members, an investigation and preventative measures are done with a union representative present.

Giving treats to dogs on your delivery route is NOT recommended. This practice conditions the dog to expect a treat and associate the route holder with the treat. This might give the route holder some security. But what happens when a relief employee has to deliver mail to this address? He or she could be facing an animal that wants its regular treat, and could become aggressive if it doesn't get it.

Often they're our best friends, but a dog can also endanger our health and safety. When you encounter a dog on your route, it's best to bear the potential hazard in mind.



Canada Post's policy 12.02.05 covers in detail how we are supposed to deal with dogs, but our experience is that the policy is not always followed by the employer, so all members need to be familiar with it. In 1995 CUPW negotiated clause 33.22 of the urban collective agreement as follows:

The Corporation shall take immediate action or measures to solve any dog related problem encountered by a delivering employee in the bargaining unit and reported in writing to the supervisor. A report regarding the action taken to resolve the problem will be provided to the employee and the local union representative.

It's Not a Workplace Accident, it's "Unsafe Behaviour": More Postal Transformation that Hurts Workers

We've all heard of the "Modern Post," Canada Post's overhaul of mail processing and delivery. New equipment, mail sequencing and more motorized routes will change our work methods. This transformation will be going on for years. But another type of change has been going on at Canada Post for many months now: the employer's attempt to transfer the responsibility for workplace accidents onto our shoulders. The number of workplace accidents at Canada Post reached historic heights in 2008, but then drastically declined in the last two years. That's good, right? Well, not necessarily. Canada Post just changed the way workplace accidents are recorded. So, the actual number of injuries is much higher than the statistics show.

The Union noticed discrepancies between the number of weekly injuries and the year-to-date numbers in the reports it receives from the employer. Injury statistics now only include accidents for which a claim has been approved. They do not include repeat occurrences and unreported accidents. A number of reported accidents end up later being denied by a workers' compensation board and these get crossed off. In one week, the Union found discrepancies of up to 20% in reported accidents. Statistically, that's a huge difference.

Reduced rates of injury are also due to various new procedures put in place by the employer. These procedures are designed to harass and blame workers who suffer accidents on the job. Injured workers are being disciplined. As a result, members have become wary about reporting their accidents to the employer.



So, what happens to good old "Frequently Injured Postie"? We didn't like the way that movie ended.

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When an injury occurs, an investigation is conducted to determine the root cause(s) of the accident. Identifying the root cause is essential to prevent the accident from happening again. Clause 33.06 of the urban collective agreement stipulates that a union representative must be part of this investigation. In violation of Clause 33.06, the employer is conducting injury-on-duty investigation without union involvement and then proceeding to do as it pleases. Here are some examples:

In February 2009, Canada Post introduced the “Frequently Injured Employee Process,” which supposedly reviews the reasons for recurring accidents and “develops an action plan to assist the employee in overcoming the unsafe behaviour.” The true purpose is to intimidate members and unilaterally transfer injured external employees to the internal group. Disciplinary letters are placed in these employees’ files and the member gets followed around by management in the workplace or on the road. The Union has filed two national grievances on this issue (N00-07-00020, before arbitrator Jolliffe, for the urban operations’ unit, and N00-08-R0008, before arbitrator Stewart, for the RSMC unit).

Canada Post has also made “Online Safety Awareness Interactive Videos.” According to Canada Post, these videos are designed “to address unsafe acts, and/or unsafe behaviours.” Upon injured employees’ return to work, they are treated to the message that “there is an alternative to being off work for minor injuries, strains/sprains, etc.” Videos are shown to employees, based on the type of injury or injured body part.

The employer claims their “behaviour-based safety” programs are “more and more being accepted and understood by employees as a normal post-injury intervention.” But the Union does not want its members patronized and blamed for accidents and injuries. These programs (including Manulife’s intrusions) are not preventing accidents. They’re preventing accident reports.

Fortunately, we have the power to stop this “postal transformation” of workplace accidents. Here’s what you can do:

- Tell members to **report all workplace accidents without exception.** We are protected by the law and our collective agreement.
- When an accident investigation takes place, **demand that a union representative be present.**
- **File grievances** if the employer doesn’t respect your rights.
- **Support your union steward** in your workplace.

No matter what the employer calls its procedures, union members will keep on doing everything in our power to make our workplaces safer.

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