

Breed Specific Legislation

What is it? Breed Specific Legislation, or BSL are sets of laws that some municipalities have, or try for that restricts or bans certain breeds of dogs that are considered dangerous (by some). There is always a reactionary outcry to ban breeds after a tragedy involving a dog,



regardless of the breed. It's easier and more convenient to blame abused, starved, abandoned or neglected animals than it is to blame irresponsible or sadistic owners. There are at least 36 different breeds of dogs affected directly. In some cities, any dog over one hundred pounds is illegal.

A Dog is a Wolf is a Dog

We like to think of our dogs as loving, devoted members of our families, and they are, but it's also important to remember that they have those teeth for a reason; they're predators. The official zoological classification for the dog used to be "Canis Familiaris" and the name for wolf is "Canis Lupes". Upon closer DNA examination, the scientific community (The American Society of

Mammalogists and the Smithsonian Institute) finally admitted that dogs and wolves were actually the same species, and officially re-classified the dog as "Canis Lupes Familiaris". That extra Latin word doesn't sound like a big deal, but it speaks volumes about every dog breed from a Toy Poodle to an Alaskan Malamute. Dogs have been domesticated and wolves haven't, but we should remember that our pets still have the instincts of a wolf, regardless of the breed. Even the instinct that drives our beloved Labs and Golden Retrievers to chase down a ball or a bird is pure, prey drive that has been inherited from their days as wolves, hunting in packs. Some dog people are fond of the phrase, "Know what you have at the end of your leash", which is a way to remind ourselves that our pets aren't human; also what they're capable of.

The breeds most associated with Breed Specific Legislation are the Rottweiler and the "Pit Bull", but there are dozens of others, some might even surprise you. It varies from county to county, or city to city; it all depends on who's breed ban it is.



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The Rottweiler is an old and noble breed; people think they have German origins, but their history actually goes back to the Roman Legions. They've been serving us for thousands of years, guarding their territory (our homes) and packs (our families). They're not a perfect breed for



every family or every home, but they do their job well and a good Rottweiler will give its life for its family. They've been selectively bred for thousands of years to be wary of strangers; if you have a Rottweiler, you should understand that. Thousands of years of selective breeding isn't going to be overcome with hugs and kisses; they want to protect, it's in their DNA. Rottweilers deserve good, suitable homes, they deserve to be understood, and they do not deserve to be banned into extinction.

The "Pit Bull" isn't really a breed of dog, it's more of a group. There can be as many as 16 breeds of dogs that some consider "Pit Bulls"; it's more like six or eight, but legislators drafting these (illogical) laws are usually clueless and don't bother learning much before voting 'yay' or 'nay'. When we see statistics on Pit Bull attacks, we need to bear in mind that they're counting many breeds as one. "Pit Bulls" are usually classified as "Pit Bull Type Dogs" to cover as much as possible, and create a huge gray area that can be manipulated. Part of the problem classifying Pit Bulls is identifying them. If a dog is part Bull Terrier, Boxer, Bullmastiff, Bulldog, Boston Terrier or any other

breed that resembles a Pit Bull type dog, it could easily be considered a "Pit Bull" by your local Government. I've even seen "Pit Bulls" that could be mistaken for smaller, smooth haired terriers or larger, leggy sight hounds. Since they aren't a specific breed, there is no breed standard that covers "Pit Bulls". They can be smaller than a Cocker Spaniel or as large as a Bullmastiff. They can be lean, athletic and agile like a Terrier or bulky and heavily muscled like a Bulldog, they can resemble hounds or Jack Russell Terriers, they can be bat eared, or the ears can be half prick, full drop, cut, or anything else; a "Pit Bull" can be any color.

Unfortunately, many of the dogs that are thought of as vicious are the real victims. These dogs have become street corner status symbols for people that are generally not responsible enough to own a pet, let alone any pet, especially a large, potentially dangerous dog. "Pit Bulls" and Rottweilers have been misused, fought, beaten, starved and abandoned in completely disproportionate numbers to other breeds; don't take my word for it, visit any big city's animal shelter. You'll find scores of strays that have been picked up from the streets, awaiting their death sentence.

There is nothing worse for a dog than abandonment, they will look for a pack, they will turn feral in time, they will become predators on our streets.

Breed Specific Legislation...



It's a Killer

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Irresponsible breeding and irresponsible dog ownership are problems, but it's important for all of us to understand that dogs generally don't attack for no reason. If a person understands dogs, they'll understand the different types of aggression.

In my opinion, Karen Delise compiled the definitive study of dog attacks in her book "Fatal Dog Attacks". She did painstaking research, and took a close look at every fatal dog attack in the US over the course of about forty years. She broke it down from every conceivable angle. We read in terrible newspaper accounts that the family pet fatally mauled a child, and they "never saw it coming". Delise points out that is almost never the case, most of these people didn't even really know their own dog. She breaks dogs into categories, "Pets" and "Resident Dogs". A Resident dog lives outside the home, loose in the yard, tethered or kenneled. They're responsible for a disproportionate number of attacks. 25% of fatal dog attacks in the US in the past forty years were by dogs that were chained up for most of their lives, 17% were by dogs

that were allowed to run loose and 3% were from dogs that lived in kennels. Dogs that are a part of the family, living in the home rarely attack their pack for "no reason". We need to watch our dogs, if they have issues with dominance or food (or toy) possession, they need to be broken of that, we should understand their territoriality issues, etc. If we know a bit about dog behavior before we bring dogs into our homes, we can eliminate a lot of the problems.

Karen Delise wrote two books on the subject, one is "Fatal Dog Attacks", the other is "The Pit Bull Placebo". If you're interested in the subject, I recommend her books, they're informative and well written. More good reading on dog behavior and the human/dog relationship that is interesting and helpful is "The Culture Clash" by Jean Donaldson.

- John Cocchiola (Gold Coast Staffords)

