

ANIMAL
CONTROL
OFFICER
SAFETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given the changing environment and unpredictability of animals, Animal Control operations present many inherent risks and exposures. For many years, it was thought that all Animal Control officer injuries were a result of doing the job and very few were preventable; however, further analysis of the types of claims that these employees experience suggest that many can be mitigated or controlled. Both the analysis of injuries and discussions with experts in the field resulted in the following best practices and lessons learned.

SCENARIO

The claimant, a 52 year-old Animal Control officer, had been working two consecutive days by herself without assistance. While working alone, she removed several dogs from their kennels for exercise in the pen area. As the claimant was closing the gate, one of the dogs aggressively charged at her and bit her right master arm. The claimant tried to pry the dog off with her nightstick, but was unable to loosen its grip. She was able to drag the dog about 15 feet to where her car was parked to get access to a large flashlight, which she then used to strike the dog in an attempt to loosen its grip. Unfortunately, after freeing herself, the dog continued to attack and bit off the tip of her left finger. The claimant was able to reach for a nearby panic alarm, notifying an employee from Public Works to come and assist.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Radio communication connected to dispatch.** A recent survey of 78 Animal Control Officers by the Connecticut Municipal Animal Control Officers' Association (CMACOA) showed that approximately 21% of all respondents do not have access to radio communication and 13% only have radios in their vehicles. To ensure that these officers have the ability to ask for help when emergency situations occur, it is recommended that each officer has access to a portable radio that is connected to someone with the ability to intervene or authorize assistance.
- **More relevant training, ranging from refreshers to personal protective equipment best practices.** CT Gen Stat § 22-328(f) states that, "each animal control officer shall complete a minimum of six hours of continuing education

related to the duties of an animal control officer each calendar year." However, not much training is offered on officer safety. Safety training helps promote safe work habits and situational awareness on what to do in an emergency.

- **Proper equipment in the kennel.** Ensure that the kennel is equipped with strategically located bite sticks and other equipment in the case of an emergency.
- **After-Accident Review.** The accurate completion of an accident investigation will aid in the prevention of future accidents by discovering and removing accident causing conditions, implementing corrective actions, and clarifying training and retraining needs.

SAVINGS

From July 1, 2012 to October 31, 2017, there were 202 Workers' Compensation injuries reported by Animal Control Officers to CIRMA, amounting to over \$1.7 million in damages. By implementing the programs outlined above, the municipality will have a better understanding on how to limit preventable accidents and minimize exposures.

RESOURCES:

- Connecticut Municipal Animal Control Officers' Association
- CT Gen Stat § 22-328(f)

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant.