

Mail carriers out to take bite out of crime — committed by attacking dogs

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A pitbull named Lucy participates at the U.S. Postal Service's "National Dog Bite Prevention Week" during an event at the YMCA in Los Angeles, California. Dog attacks on postal workers rose last year to 6,755, up 206 from the previous year and the highest in three decades. AP photo

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Mailman James Solomon thought he knew how to prevent a dog attack: watch the pet carefully, use the mail bag as a shield, and if necessary pull out the emergency red-pepper dog spray.

However, nothing prepared him for what happened when a woman answered his knock.

"It was three little hot dogs who came out and bit me on the shin," Solomon said, describing dachshunds. "There was nothing I could do. It didn't hurt that much," he said, but they kept coming, "one after the other."

Booming online sales are good news for the U.S. Postal Service, but its carriers are paying a cost: more dog bites.

Dog attacks on mail carriers rose last year to 6,755, a 30-year high and up 206 from the previous year. Los Angeles, California, topped the 2016 list with 80 attacks on mail carriers. Next came Houston, Texas, with 62 and Cleveland, Ohio, with 60.

The Postal Service released its annual dog-bite figures as part of National Dog Bite Prevention Week. The yearly event began Sunday.

A Big Bite Out Of Postal Service Budget

A longtime cliché of movies, dog biting of mail carriers is no laughing matter for the post office. It costs the Postal Service millions of dollars each year in medical and other expenses.

"Even good dogs have bad days," said U.S. Postal Service Safety Director Linda DeCarlo in Los Angeles. "Dog bite prevention training and continuing education are important to keep pet owners, pets and those who visit homes — like letter carriers — happy and healthy."

DeCarlo urges owners to secure their dogs in a separate room before opening the door. In addition, she said, people should not take mail directly from letter carriers in front of their dog, which may view it as a threatening gesture.

Overall, an estimated 4.5 million Americans are bitten by dogs annually, most of them children. In the last year, dog attacks on mail carriers rose 3 percent. Still, while the number of dog-bite claims is rising, there are signs attacks may be less severe. The average cost per claim fell last year by more than 10 percent to \$33,230.

Now There Is A Warning App

After a 14 percent jump in dog attacks in 2015, the post office launched an app to help warn carriers of potentially hostile dogs. Customers requesting package-pickup are now asked if they have dogs. In extreme cases, residents are told to pick up mail at a post office until a repeat-offender dog is restrained.

"It's always on your mind as a carrier, 'Is there a dog in the area, and is it a threat?'" said Solomon. Officially, only 2 percent of carriers were bitten last year. However, Solomon says every carrier he knows has had some kind of "dog experience," from outrunning an angry dog to persuading a pet to back off.

The rise in dog attacks has a simple explanation: the post office is delivering far more packages than ever before.

There are two main reasons for this uptick in deliveries. First, the U.S. population has been growing, which means there are now more residences on a carrier's route.

Second, consumers are increasingly demanding seven-day-a-week package delivery and groceries dropped at their doorstep. As a result, postal carriers are visiting homes more frequently and at all times of day.

Watch Out For Smaller Dogs

United Parcel Service (UPS) said its 66,000 deliverers suffered about 900 dog bites last year. Spokesman Dan McMackin, a former UPS driver, said he used to carry dog biscuits to woo vicious pets. McMackin said he generally found smaller dog breeds to be more troublesome than "hunting dogs," who "don't have much to prove."

FedEx said it does not keep track of the number of dog attacks on its drivers.

Business professor Robert Lieb said he expects dog attacks to keep increasing as deliveries increase. Still, dogs may prove to be less of a problem if Amazon, the leading online seller, changes its delivery to a new method: the remote-controlled miniature airplanes known as drones.

"The question is whether drones will land or parachute the packages down," said Lieb. "I would see eagles, not dogs, taking out drones."

Quiz

1 According to the article, companies are offering solutions they hope will lead to a decrease in dog attacks.

Which paragraph BEST supports the idea outlined above?

- (A) Mailman James Solomon thought he knew how to prevent a dog attack: watch the pet carefully, use the mail bag as a shield, and if necessary pull out the emergency red-pepper dog spray.
- (B) After a 14 percent jump in dog attacks in 2015, the post office launched an app to help warn carriers of potentially hostile dogs. Customers requesting package-pickup are now asked if they have dogs. In extreme cases, residents are told to pick up mail at a post office until a repeat-offender dog is restrained.
- (C) Spokesman Dan McMackin, a former UPS driver, said he used to carry dog biscuits to woo vicious pets. McMackin said he generally found smaller dog breeds to be more troublesome than "hunting dogs," who "don't have much to prove."
- (D) Still, dogs may prove to be less of a problem if Amazon, the leading online seller, changes its delivery to a new method: the remote-controlled miniature airplanes known as drones.

2 Which piece of evidence from the article BEST explains the cause of rising numbers of dog attacks?

- (A) "It was three little hot dogs who came out and bit me on the shin," Solomon said, describing dachshunds.
- (B) "Even good dogs have bad days," said U.S. Postal Service Safety Director Linda DeCarlo in Los Angeles.
- (C) As a result, postal carriers are visiting homes more frequently and at all times of day.
- (D) McMackin said he generally found smaller dog breeds to be more troublesome than "hunting dogs," who "don't have much to prove."

- 3 How does the section "Now There Is A Warning App" relate to the section "Watch Out For Smaller Dogs"?
- (A) "Now There Is A Warning App" explains the main problem in the article while "Watch Out For Smaller Dogs" suggests a potential solution.
 - (B) "Now There Is A Warning App" shows the cause of dog attacks while "Watch Out For Smaller Dogs" shows the effect of one company's drone usage.
 - (C) "Now There Is A Warning App" provides specific examples of attacks while "Watch Out For Smaller Dogs" provides generalizations instead.
 - (D) "Now There Is A Warning App" compares dog attacks in the U.S. and "Watch Out For Smaller Dogs" contrasts different companies' delivery methods.
- 4 How does the introduction [paragraphs 1-6] develop the main idea of the article?
- (A) It provides a chronological guide for mail carriers to follow so they can prevent dog attacks.
 - (B) It provides an anecdote of one mail carrier's experience with a dog attack while on the job.
 - (C) It provides statistics about dog bites, their victims and the overall cost to delivery services.
 - (D) It provides a resource from the Postal Service that helps everyone prevent dog bites.