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Hheads of Operations
Regional Directors
HM Inspectors of Health and Safety

DOG ATTACKS ON ROYAL MAIL DELIVERY STAFF

This SIM draws Inspectors attention to the high number of reportable accidents that occur as a result of dog attacks and to the new Royal Mail procedures for dealing with them. It provides guidance for Inspectors on the action they should take.

INTRODUCTION

1 In the period 97/98 there were 334 reportable accidents to delivery staff as a result of animal attacks, primarily dogs, of these 5 were major injuries. Injuries have resulted in severe damage to the face and fingers. When a dog bite penetrates the skin it can lead to infections including the possibility of tetanus. Also an individual may experience considerable fear when asked to resume delivery work. Royal Mail figures for serious bites leading to sickness absence over the same period were 635. This figure has been increasing over the last few years. It accounts for 7.3% of their sick leave accidents being the fourth largest accident category.

2 In response to the increasing number of dog attacks the Royal Mail has produced "The Good Practice Guide to Dealing with Dog Attacks" in May 1998.

3 The policy behind the guide is designed to reduce and ultimately eliminate attacks by dogs on Royal Mail staff by putting in place a number of preventative measures. All reported incidents involving dogs, whether staff are injured or not will be fully investigated by the line manager. Where attacks do occur, the policy defines what action line managers should take against the dog owners.

THE GUIDE

4 The first step requires the completion of a risk assessment using dog attack incident sheets, walk logs and local knowledge. A risk assessment form is included within the guide. This assessment should identify high risk areas thereby enabling managers to produce an action plan. Next staff should be trained in the standard safe system of work detailed in the guide which includes how to identify a potential dog attack and what action to take. Further information is also contained in the Royal Mail video entitled "Why Risk It".

5 Under the guide, dog deterrent devices are only provided where a need is identified by

the risk assessment.

6 All reported attacks or incidents of menacing are to be entered on a local hazard card, walk book and dog attack incident sheet. This information is kept available for staff working the round.

7 When it has not been possible to deliver to an address as a result of a dog this is reported to a line manager. The mail is marked with an "unable to deliver" sticker. Depending on the circumstances a second attempt may be made to deliver. If this is unsuccessful the manager will write or telephone the customer to explain the situation. Failure to resolve the problem will lead to a second attempt to inform the customer that mail will not be delivered to their address.

8 Where there is a local dog warden local management are to seek a partnership arrangement. A visit by the dog warden to the owners of the dog has been found to be more effective than a letter from a local manager. However some local authorities may not wish to enter into such a voluntary partnership arrangement.

9 In all cases of injury staff are encouraged to report the incident to the police. This requires staff to give a statement and possibly be called as a witness should the police initiate proceedings. Managers are to give full support to their staff in such circumstances. If the police decline to take action the Royal Mail will consider taking its own legal action using the Dogs Act 1871 or The Dangerous Dog Act 1991. When an attack results in more than 7 days absence from work there is a Compensation Scheme available to employees.

ACTION BY INSPECTORS

10 The Post Office is divided into separate businesses, the largest being Royal Mail followed by Parcel Force. HSE inspects Parcel Force premises whilst Royal Mail premises are inspected by local authorities. Post Office peripatetic activities e.g. letter /parcel deliveries fall to HSE enforcement, except where an accident occurs on LA enforced premises. Due to the low numbers of dog attacks experienced by Parcel Force they have not needed to implement the procedures in the guide.

11 Given the number of reportable accidents it is important the HSE ensures that the guide is being applied by local Royal Mail management. Local authority inspectors may already have taken an interest in ensuring its implementation at Royal Mail premises, close co-operation would therefore be advisable to ensure a consistent response. Given the large number of locations which could report accidents involving dog attacks inspectors may wish to consider a strategic approach incorporating the following:

1. Joint visits with local authority inspectors to major sorting offices in city areas to discuss implementation of the guide.
2. Reactive visits after a serious dog attack to ensure the procedures in the guide have been correctly followed.
3. Forwarding a standard letter asking what action has been taken before and after an attack.

RECOMMENDED ENFORCEMENT

12 As the guide was issued in May 1998 Royal Mail management have had adequate time to prepare their risk assessment and action plan. Failure to have completed this work should lead inspectors to consider the use of an Improvement Notice (Management Regulations Reg. 3(1)).

13 The time scale for implementation of the measures in the action plan will inevitably vary. For instance a large city centre office is likely to have greater problems and more staff to train. A pragmatic approach should therefore be adopted to implementation. However the lack of a suitable programme with implementation dates should lead inspectors to considering the use of an Improvement Notice for lack of suitable arrangements. (Management Regs, Reg. 4(1)).

14 The Engineering & Utilities Sector - Nottingham has a copy of the guide and the video "Why Risk It". Also available is a Royal Mail Directory, extracts of which can be made available to identify appropriate premises.

15 HSE was not consulted on the guide prior to its release. Therefore the Engineering & Utilities Sector - Nottingham would appreciate any comments inspectors may wish to make on its practical application.

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