

Dangerous or Vicious Dogs
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A 2006 Virginia law provides for the registration of dangerous dogs and establishes penalties for owners of dangerous dogs who do not comply with registration and confinement requirements.

The Virginia Bicycling Federation (VBF) urges bicyclists to report dangerous dogs to law enforcement authorities to make our roads safer for everyone.

This law is relatively new, so bicyclists must know the law to effectively coach police, animal control officers, and judges through the steps needed to have a dangerous dog registered as such. Thus, VBF encourages all bicyclists to print the act [<http://tinyurl.com/3wprxe> or <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/animals/dogs.shtml>] and read it closely.

The law defines a "**dangerous dog**" as a dog that "has bitten, attacked, or inflicted injury on a person", whereas a "**vicious dog**" is a dog that "has killed a person, inflicted serious injury, or continued to exhibit behavior that resulted in a previous finding that it is a dangerous dog".

There are serious consequences for a dog owner when a dog is declared "dangerous", including registering the dog with the Dangerous Dog Registry; paying the registration fee; maintaining \$100,000 in liability insurance coverage; and conforming to confinement, leashing and muzzling requirements. Should the dog repeat the dangerous behavior or should a dog be declared vicious, the court may order the dog euthanized.

If you are bitten by a dog, the law requires that a law-enforcement or animal control officer "... apply to a magistrate of the jurisdiction for the issuance of a summons requiring the owner ... to appear before court, etc."

Because it is often difficult to contact animal control officers, VBF suggests that bicyclists who encounter a dangerous dog call 911 to report an "attack" to the responding law enforcement officer(s) and ask them to contact the animal control officer. A cyclist who has been bitten can certainly make a case for a dog to be declared "dangerous"; and a cyclist whose bike has been run into, or under, by a dog, and caused to fall, could make a good case that they have been "attacked". If, however, the dog has run at your bike, but not bitten or caused you to fall, enforcement officials are unlikely to declare a dog "dangerous".

Please notify Bud Vye [bdvye@comcast.net] if you contact law enforcement officials about a dog attack, so that VBF can document dog attacks against bicyclists.

There may be some effort and inconvenience involved in waiting for police and/or animal control to arrive at the scene, and appearing in court later. However, if we, the bicycling community, can track and publicize these judgments, we hope owners of these dogs will better control their animals, resulting in fewer dogs interfering with, chasing, and attacking bicyclists.