

Encounters with free running dogs on public roads  
**CALL 911!**  
**Animal Control 863-655-6475**

Florida law gives state -wide protection to any cyclist who encounters a free running dog while on a public road. The protection applies beyond any protection provided by local leash laws. However, cyclists need to be aware that it is critical to report incidents to Animal Control (AC) for investigation; **unreported incidents don't count.**

*Remember, the safety of fellow cyclists riding on the road in the area where you encounter a dangerous dog will be positively impacted if you take the time to report the violation, stay at the scene, until the law enforcement officers arrive, give the sworn affidavits to AC, etc.*

**First**, the owner of a dog that bites a cyclist who is on a public road is liable for damages suffered by the person bitten, regardless of the former viciousness of the dog or the owner's knowledge of such viciousness.

**Second**, Animal Control is required to investigate reported incidents involving any dog that may be dangerous.

**Third**, the law provides severe penalties for the owner of any dog that Animal Control has classified as a "dangerous dog": The owner may be cited for a misdemeanor and the dog destroyed.

**Fourth**, in order for Animal Control to be able to classify as "dangerous" a dog that has bitten, or attacked, or endangered a cyclist on a public road there must be a record of that incident in the records of AC and an investigation of the incident conducted by AC. This is where the affected cyclist and others play a key role in addressing the free running dog- problem- insuring the record of the incident is made in AC records.

**Fifth**, effective enforcement of the key element for the protection of cyclists (classifying a dog as "dangerous) requires that a cyclist who is chased or approached or bitten by a free running dog, in a menacing or apparent attitude of attack, while on a public road, contact AC immediately for an investigation by an AC officer, giving the address where the dog resides, and that the cyclist (and one or more persons who desire to have the dog classified as dangerous) gives a sworn statements (affidavit) to AC about the incident . CALL 911. The 911 call creates a recorded call and nature of the call, namely a request for law enforcement and AC officer to respond to the scene and for an investigation of a dangerous dog.

*While it may be a great inconvenience to wait at the scene until law enforcement and an Animal Control officer arrive, active interaction by the cyclist with the officers at the scene and getting sworn statements to AC is a must -do to stop the offending dogs from running free on public roads.*

This is only a summary of some highlights of the Florida Statutes, CHAPTER 767 DAMAGE BY DOGS, which should be consulted for more details and definitions of important terms.