

UNFIT TO BE TIED?

Group says it's cruel, dangerous to always keep dogs on leashes

Reprint of article By ANN ZANIEWSKI Of The Oakland Press -Aug 29, 2005 - PONTIAC

On a leash is no way to live. That belief has driven **Terry Hodskins (Lake Sherwood—Commerce Rd)** all over Pontiac, passionately explaining to homeowners that dogs that are always leashed are lonely, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous.

The Waterford Township woman volunteers for Dogs Deserve Better, a national organization that seeks to ban tethering dogs.

Hodskins, 37, said the problem is especially pronounced in Pontiac. Many animals spend their lives outside attached to trees and fences. Earlier this month, a pitbull kept in a cage in a man's basement on Going Street which Hodskins says is as emotionally damaging as tethering attacked 8- and 13-year-old girls after the pair took it outside.

"If a dog stays chained up, they become neurotic," Hodskins said. "They're pack animals, so they like to be with other animals and people." Because of pack instincts, having little or no social interaction with its owners makes a dog feel dejected and sad, she said. Over time, frustration can turn to aggression. Chained dogs become very territorial of the small area to which they're confined. And knowing that being tied down makes them more vulnerable, dogs become defensive and unpredictable, Hodskins said.

The Web site for Pennsylvania-based Dogs Deserve Better says that from October 2003 to June 2005, chained dogs killed or injured at least 42 children nationwide. Hodskins said several counties across the county and the entire state of Connecticut have laws against chaining dogs.

Michigan Humane Society lobbyist Eileen Liska is going to introduce to state lawmakers this fall an amendment to Michigan's anti-cruelty laws that would ban permanent tethering. She said the language could say, for instance, that dogs cannot be chained for more than eight hours in a day.

"People need to understand that keeping an animal on a chain or rope without taking them off is really an invitation for danger," Liska said. Hodskins is meeting Sept. 14 with the Pontiac City Council about passing an anti-chaining ordinance and initiatives that would make it easier for residents to put up fences. She plans to meet with Waterford Township officials.

Also hoping for a countywide ban, Hodskins recently spoke with Mike Zehnder, Oakland County's director of public services. Zehnder said county officials would be willing to look at a formal proposal. "We would entertain anything that would be a benefit to the citizens of this county," he said. Marie Skladd, president of the volunteer Animal Care Network, said a tethering ban would be hard to impose in Pontiac. The city already has several anti-cruelty rules, but enforcement is spotty. And, because of layoffs, the Animal Control department was cut this summer from two officers to one.

"How will anything change if there's just not enough folks to get it done?" she said. Another concern, Skladd said, is that people might skirt the law by moving mistreated animals into basements, making it harder for rescue workers to get to them. People who chain their dogs offer Hodskins a variety of excuses. Some say the pets got too big. Others see a cheap alarm system or simply don't realize that tethering is bad for an animal. Often, the dogs are ignored and lack adequate provisions. "The people that chain their dogs, to be honest with you, don't deserve to have a dog," she said. For the past six weeks, Hodskins has knocked on doors in Pontiac with armfuls of pamphlets explaining the dangers of chaining and how to prevent heartworm disease. She was planning a weekend to help clear tree branches and litter from a family's yard, preparing it for a new fence. Three dogs that were on chains will have a place to run.