

## **Pit bull attack victim says harsher punishments needed**

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LAS CRUCES - An East Mesa retiree who was attacked by a pit bull Wednesday is calling for harsher punishment for the owners of aggressive dogs.

Doña Ana County animal control supervisor Joe Jacquez, who responded to the call on Isolation Point Road, about seven miles north of U.S. 70, said there are no excuses when it comes to dogs "terrorizing" area residents.

Jeff North was walking to his mailbox around 5 p.m. Wednesday when his neighbor's pit bull - which is usually chained in the yard - bolted out of its yard, barking and snapping at him.

"It's a community concern, because I think elderly people - and I'm not too elderly - should be able to walk freely anywhere in the county," said North, who said he hurt his back trying to squirm away from the dog. "When (attacks) do happen, people still aren't punished - and it's supposed to be a felony."

Under the New Mexico Dangerous Dog Act, the owner of a dog who seriously injures or kills someone can be punished with up to six years in prison if the owner had reason to believe their dog could inflict serious injury. Authorities are considering such a charge for the Truth or Consequences owner of four pit bulls who escaped from their yard on Easter and brutally mauled a 48-year-old woman who was walking in her neighborhood, killing her.

North says he's not just worried about his own safety, but that of children who also live in the neighborhood.

"They shouldn't be restricted either," he said. "When I grew up, kids could ride bicycles in the neighborhood. I don't know what the deal is here with Las Cruces. This is an uncivilized area."

By the time county animal control officers showed up Wednesday, though, the dog was already back in her yard, chained up, Jacquez said. The woman who owned it couldn't be cited because officers didn't observe the violation and because North wasn't visibly injured.

"I made it clear (to the owner) that, 'Your dog is terrorizing people out there. There are no excuses. You know that (if it bites someone) we'll pick up the dog for 10 days, at your expense, and you can claim it after 10 days, and it has to be observed,'" Jacquez said.

Jacquez encourages anyone else who is menaced by a dog to contact authorities, who will respond immediately.

And dog owners, he said, should "secure their fence and property appropriately, keep their dogs vaccinated - and respect their neighbors. I would say, too, that chaining a dog is going to instill in it some vicious-type behavior and that's no secret. Most people know - you chain your dog, it's going to get mean."

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