



Support for adopters

INFORMATION FOR NEW DOG OWNERS

Dogs and the law

Owning and caring for a dog can be great fun and rewarding in many ways but it's important you know about dog laws, in order to protect yourself, your dog and others. This guide will help you understand what your responsibilities are.

Animal Welfare

If you own, or are responsible for a dog, even on a temporary basis, you are required by law to care for it properly and take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare needs are met. One aspect of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is that owners must provide their animals with a suitable environment, a suitable diet, the ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns, protection from pain suffering, injury and disease and the animals needs to be housed with, or apart from, other animals.

Our booklet 'How to take care of your dog' will help you to find out more about what your dog's welfare needs are and how to help them stay healthy and happy. There is also a statutory Code of Practice which is designed to help you comply with the Animal Welfare Act 2006, you can find these on the Government websites; for England www.gov.uk and Wales www.wales.gov.uk

Identification

- **Collar and tag** - The law (Control of Dogs Order 1992) states that your dog must wear a collar and a tag when in public. The tag must have your name and address on; your telephone number can be helpful too. Without a collar it is possible that your dog may be seized and treated as a stray. You should always keep the contact details on the tag up-to-date.
- **Microchip** - From 2015 in Wales and 2016 in England the law will make it compulsory for owners to have their dogs microchipped (if they are over 8 weeks of age). At the RSPCA we microchip all our dogs before they are rehomed but under law the owner is responsible for keeping the contact details up-to-date and failure to do so can result in a fine. That means if you move home or change your phone number you need to update the details.
- **Stray dogs** - Having a collar and tag are essential in case he/she goes missing. Should your dog go missing your local authority should be your first point of contact. They have the responsibility for strays and may charge you a fee to reclaim your dog. If a dog is not claimed within 7 days the local authority has the right to rehome or euthanase the dog. Up-to-date identification will make it easier for your dog to be reunited with you.

Taking your dog out

- **Transport** - The UK Highway Code states that dogs must be suitably restrained when in a vehicle so that they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. Make sure you have a seat belt harness or other suitable method such as a dog guard or crate for restraining your dog in the car.
- **Dogs in hot cars** - Never leave your dogs alone in a car on a warm day. Dogs pant to keep cool. In hot stuffy cars they are unable to cool themselves down - leaving a window open or a sunshield on your windscreen won't keep your dog cool enough. Leaving your dog in a hot car may be considered an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Every year dogs do die in hot cars.
- **Keeping on a lead** - On some designated roads, as well as all motorways, it is an offence to have your dog off the lead. In order to stay within the law and in the interests of your dog's safety we recommend keeping your dog on a lead at all times when you are on a road. Local authorities can also make it a requirement for dogs to be kept on leads in certain areas such as some public gardens and parks. Contact your local council for more information in your area.
- **Cleaning up** - In England and Wales laws can require you to clean up after your dog. Failure to do so can result in a fine. Don't be caught out, make sure your pockets are well stocked with poo bags whenever you and your dog are out and about and ensure you dispose of the bag properly.

Control of dogs

- **Dangerously out of control** - It is a criminal offence (Dangerous Dog Act 1991) to allow your dog to be 'dangerously out of control' either in a public place or on private property e.g. your home. A 'dangerously out of control' dog can be defined as a dog that has injured someone or a dog that a person has grounds to reasonably believe that it may injure somebody. Something as simple as your dog chasing, barking at or jumping up at a person or child could result in an investigation, so ensure your dog is under control at all times. If your dog injures somebody, it may be seized and if convicted you could face a lengthy prison sentence and/or a fine. Your dog could also be euthanised (unless you can persuade the Courts that it is not a danger to the public, in which case it may be subject to a control order). Under the same law it is also a criminal offence if your dog attacks an assistance dog. If at any point you are concerned about your dog's behaviour or need advice on training please get in touch with the RSPCA centre or branch where you adopted your dog from.
- **Livestock worrying** - Dogs must never worry livestock - the owner or whoever is responsible for the dog at the time will be committing an offence if the dog chases, attacks or causes suffering to livestock. A police officer may seize a dog suspected to be worrying livestock and if convicted of an offence under this Act then a person may be liable to a maximum fine of £1,000. It should be noted that a farmer may be able to shoot any dog worrying livestock if there are no other reasonable means for stopping the dog from doing this. To avoid this, keep your dog on a lead at all times when livestock are around.

Please feel free to get in touch if you are concerned about any dog laws and what they mean to you as a dog owner.

Please note that some dog laws differ between England and Wales. For example, in Wales it is illegal to use electric shock collars (Animal Welfare [Electronic Collars] Wales Regulations 2010). The RSPCA support this law and are opposed to the use of electronic collars however this legislation does not currently exist in England. Please visit your Government's website for more information on dog laws in your country and contact your Local Authority for information on bylaws applicable to your local area.