

Port police take aim at irresponsible pet owners

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Patrols will crack down on residents who fail to leash, clean up after their animals

It's a doggone shame, but irresponsible pet owners have prompted the Port Washington Police Department to begin pet patrols.

The patrols are not aimed at strays, but at owners, particularly those who don't obey pooper-scooper and leash laws.

"It's out of control," Police Chief Richard Thomas said, noting the department has been logging more and more complaints from residents.

"It's become extremely frustrating for a number of citizens, and we're hearing about it," he said. "We think it's gotten to the point, going into summer, where we need to remind citizens of their responsibilities."

On a recent weekend, he was walking along the path to the north beach and saw several piles of fresh poop there, Thomas noted.

"That's unacceptable," he said. "We're a pet-friendly city, but at the same time we need to respect the rights of others and take responsibility for our pets."

The city has done what it can to make it easy for people with pets to handle the messes that invariably result, Thomas said.

"I don't know of any other community where they have metal containers with Baggies in the parks," he said. "It makes it very simple to handle things."

"But there are those who violate and are making our parks and walkways unattractive. It's also a sanitation and health risk, especially for children."

People who allow their dogs to roam unleashed are causing safety concerns, Thomas said, noting walkers who encounter them don't know what to expect.

"People don't know if a dog's going to be friendly to them or not," he said. "You don't know if they're going to bite you or knock you down."

Beginning in May and based on available staffing, members of the bike patrol will be assigned to the public areas where most complaints are logged — Interurban Trail, Upper Lake Park, Veterans Memorial Park and Rotary Park — Thomas said.

As time permits, they will also patrol the north beach, he said.

"Our focus is on the public areas where citizens walk, ride their bikes, Rollerblade and gather for

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recreational activities,” Thomas said.

Initially, the patrols will focus on education, he said, adding that warnings will be issued to offenders.

“Anybody observed with a dog not properly secured on a leash or not picking up after their dog will be warned,” Thomas said.

In June, officers will begin a strict enforcement campaign, citing violators, he said.

“I’m hoping this will help generate compliance,” Thomas said.

The city’s pet ordinances will be discussed in this month’s city newsletter, which is posted on the city Web site at www.ci.port-washington.wi.us , Thomas said

The ordinances prohibit people from keeping more than two dogs and two cats in any house or place of business. If a pet has a litter, it may be kept for three months.

Dogs and cats must be licensed annually, the ordinances state, and they must be leashed when on public property. They are not allowed on private property without the owner’s permission when not secured or confined in a fenced enclosure.

Owners must clean up after their pets relieve themselves, and they cannot dispose of the poop on someone else’s property, the ordinances state.

Owners cannot keep dogs that continuously bark or create a disturbance that bothers the neighborhood or people passing by, the law states.