

DOG OWNERS BEWARE: NO "ONE FREE BITE" RULE IN CALIFORNIA

In Recognition of National Dog Bite Prevention Week (May 20-26) Attorneys Jason Cohn and Saar Swartzon Educate Consumers about the Legal Responsibilities of Dog Ownership

Warmer temperatures and longer days mean taking longer walks with Spot. You may trust your dog would never bite someone but are you one hundred percent sure? For dog owners, a dog bite can mean major consequences. When a person is bitten by a dog in California, the dog owner is liable for damages even for first time bites. As attorneys who have too often seen first-hand the long-term anguish of dog bite victims, Jason Cohn and Saar Swartzon of [Cohn & Swartzon](#) see [National Dog Bite Prevention Week](#) as an opportunity to urge consumers to fully understand the state and municipal laws pertaining to dog bites.

"Dog owners need to be acutely aware of the laws relating to their pets and take action to prevent their dogs from inflicting life-long scars and emotional trauma," said Saar Swartzon, partner at Cohn & Swartzon. "After working with families traumatized from serious dog bites, it is my sincere hope that dog owners will become more diligent in safely managing their pets."

According to the Center for Disease Control, dogs bite approximately 4.5 million people each year in the United States. Those who are at the greatest risk include children from ages five to nine, adult males and individuals with dogs in their homes. In 2006, more than 31,000 people underwent reconstructive surgery as a result of dog bites. These disfiguring injuries can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) along with embarrassment and humiliation.

Cohn and Swartzon, recognized authorities on personal injury issues, are readily available for interviews on the following legal responsibilities of dog ownership.

- **Become familiar with the no "one free bite" rule in California** - California Civil Code states "The owner of any dog is liable for the damages suffered by any person who is bitten by the dog while in a public place or lawfully in a private place, including the property of the owner of the dog, regardless of the former viciousness of the dog or the owner's knowledge of such viciousness." The law in California makes an owner strictly liable for any dog that causes injury. This liability extends to other dogs that are attacked as well.
- **Review homeowner or renters insurance policies to make sure proper insurance coverage is included** - This protects in most cases the dog owner from having to pay damages related to dog injury claims. Make sure the insurance policy does not exclude your particular breed of dog. Owners should have enough insurance coverage to protect their assets.
- **Understand the risks of not having proper insurance coverage** - Homeowners who do not have the proper insurance coverage in their home insurance policy are personally liable even if the attacking dog belongs to a renter. Most dog maulings involve ribs and tears of flesh and victims are generally awarded high damages as injuries can relate to these injuries. According to Professional Insurance Agents, dog bite claims exceeded \$400 million across the nation in 2010 and cost on average \$26,000 per claim. Dog owners without proper insurance coverage can lose their homes, assets and income as a result of a single dog bite.
- **Owners are still liable in dog parks** – The location of the dog mauling does not matter. California's strict liability statute applies even to public places such as parks and beaches: California Civil Code states, "The owner of any dog is liable for the damages suffered by any person who is bitten by the dog while in a public place or lawfully in a private place."

Cohn & Swartzon, P.C., is a progressive law firm committed to vigorously representing the legal rights of its clients in the areas of catastrophic personal injury, automobile accidents, wrongful death, slip/trip and falls, defective products and dog maulings. Jason D. Cohn and Saar Swartzon, both graduates of the University of Southern California, provide more than 25 years of combined litigation experience to their clients. For more information, please call (888) 444-1955 or visit www.oc-personalinjurylawyer.com.

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