

The Perfect Dog Park

By Attorney Kenneth Phillips

Dog parks can be safe and sane. On the other hand, they can be dangerous and crazy. Knowing one from the other is important to your dog, your health, and the future of your favorite dog park.

The perfect dog park! What is its single most important characteristic? Maintenance! Pick-up bags have to be plentiful. Garbage pails must be frequently emptied. Signs need to be well-placed and in good condition. Holes need filling. Grass and turf need watering. Restrooms and benches need cleaning.

It takes a budget to maintain a dog park, and then it requires supervision. A good way to achieve a perfect dog park is to establish a dog park club. Members will include the local residents who own dogs. They will help the city to plan and run the park. Perhaps they also will assist in the selection of a professional consultant who is knowledgeable about problems in dog parks.

What kind of dogs would be found in the perfect dog park? Only the appropriate ones! Not one unneutered male. No overly aggressive, overly assertive, overly unruly, or undersocialized dogs. No puppies or fearful dogs, ready to bite from the sheer panic of being there. No dog that got dropped off by its owner. And no dog that has been declared to be dangerous by a court or the animal control department.

Who would go to the perfect dog park? Perfectly responsible dog owners! They will clean up after their dogs. Not too young, too old or infirm, because they will have to control their dogs. They won't bring more than three dogs to the park at once, for clean-up and control purposes. The professional dog walkers, obedience train-



ers and dog clubs will have to buy a permit and limit their presence to off-peak hours.

Like Boy and Girl Scouts, park users will be prepared with leashes to take control of their dogs, and lead them into and out of the park. And like my own Yorkie, they will always be attentive to all the goings on, anticipating problems before they occur.

Because even Mary Poppins, by her own admission, was only “practically perfect,” the perfect dog park will need rules, signs and enforcement. Maintenance and clean-up regulations must be prominently posted and oft-repeated. Signs will

announce what kinds of dogs and types of people will be allowed into, and forbidden from, the park. The leash law will be strictly enforced in the immediate vicinity of the park. The park club will help by monitoring the conduct of park users, encouraging practically perfect behavior.

The perfect dog park! Where would it be? In the perfect location, of course!

Not too far from you, but not too close, because noise can be an issue. And not uphill from you, because rain water will carry little boats of dirty you-know-what, filling your street with bacteria. So, not too close to, or uphill from, a school, either. And a perfect dog park will have enough parking spaces, so your street won't get crowded with cars and people walking to and fro with dogs on the sidewalk.

Rules and enforcement are topics that are close to my heart – at least as close as my Yorkie. Some dog owners think that dog parks are lawless, Wild West towns where anything goes. Not at all! A dog park is simply an area that is exempt from the local leash law, nothing more. People who suffer bodily injuries or injuries to their dogs have the same rights inside the park that they do outside



it. Leash-optional parks are not zones of immunity for irresponsible dog owners and dangerous dogs.

I'll be back in the next issue, to tell you more about the laws that will help make a perfect dog park. 🐾



About the Author

Beverly Hills Attorney Kenneth Phillips has devoted his entire law practice to representing dog bite victims. As he puts it, "my goal is to reduce the conflicts between dogs and people, and between people over dogs." He is regarded as the USA's leading expert in the field of dog bite law. He has been called "the dog bite king" (Today Show), "California's leading dog bite lawyer" (Time Magazine), and "the nation's best-known practitioner of terrier torts" (Los Angeles Times). You probably have seen him on CNN, NBC, CBS, ABC, MS-NBC, Fox News Channel, and Court TV.

Mr. Phillips is the author of Dog Bite Law, an online treatise for dog owners and dog bite victims (www.dogbitelaw.com). He also wrote What To Do If Your Dog Is Injured Or Killed, a self-help book for dog owners whose pets have been wrongfully harmed (available for downloading at his website). Additionally, he authored a collection of essential contracts and legal documents for

canine professionals; the documents and a 90-minute seminar are packaged together as Avoiding Liability When You Train, Shelter or Adopt Out (available at his website).

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