



Information Series

Barking: What you need to know if you are bothered by a barking dog.

A dog in your neighborhood is causing a problem – its barking is making you miserable. You know it isn't really the dog's fault, but you're having some pretty dark thoughts about its future health.

Barking complaints are bad news for everyone. For you, because you probably lost sleep last night; for dog owners since people are startled (and very unhappy) to find an Animal Control Officer at their door; and for us, because we're trying to deal with people with seriously frayed tempers. Unfortunately, the solutions are not simple. We can't just take the dog nor magically make it stop barking. The citation procedure has several steps.

We hope the following information will help you understand what local ordinances say about noise caused by pet animals and how we can help with the problem.

Unincorporated Thurston County does not enforce a barking ordinance. However, we can send a letter to the owner of the barking dog.

In Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater, the ordinances state:

“Any person who harbors, keeps, maintains, or has temporary custody of a pet animal shall be responsible for the behavior of such animal whether the owner knowingly permits the behavior or not. Such person shall violate the terms...if such person's animal constitutes a nuisance pet animal...”



“Nuisance pet animal means a pet animal that...habitually or continually disturbs the peace of any individual or neighborhood by barking, whining, howling or making any other noise...”

What information do we need?

The first time you call us about a barking dog, we will ask you whether this is the first time the dog has barked continuously; what time the dog began barking; about how long the barking continues; whether you can tell if it is barking in response to a particular stimulus; exactly where the dog owner lives; and, if there is more than one dog, which dog is doing the obnoxious barking. This may seem like a lot of information from someone suffering from a sleepless night, but unless we can go to the correct house and can tell the pet owner exactly what the problem is, we haven't helped at all.

Then what?

Usually, the dog owner's first response is “Why didn't they come to me?” It removes a whole layer of anger if you have already talked to the pet owner. If the pet has never barked like that before, there may have been a special circumstance, and it's usually better to talk to the neighbor or leave them a note. We do not give the pet owner your name, unless you have told us it's okay to do so. But, we can't keep them from making a lucky guess.

What if it keeps happening?

About 10% of our barking complaints are repeats. The dog owner may be trying the wrong things to fix the problem, not trying anything, or trying very hard but has a dog that is a neurotic barker. We will have made training information available to them and made suggestions that we know have been successful in other situations.

When the problem continues, we need written statements from you and at least one other neighbor if we are to impact the problem with possible court action. If you have no other neighbors, an audio or video tape may suffice. Because our officer is not present long enough to document continuous or habitual barking, your statement is the basis for citation. A barking violation is considered a civil infraction. If a citation is issued, we are not then able to keep your name confidential.

It's a good idea to review what the law sees as "Continuous or Habitual." The dog that barks five or ten random minutes – morning and/or evening – is not in this definition.

- A dog that barks all day long with a steady yapping, or howls all day or night with quiet times of only ten minutes or so is a "continuous barker."
- A dog that barks steadily from 10 pm to 2 am every night is a "habitual barker."
- A dog that barks when kids play with it or when it's excited by the paper carrier is not an habitual barker.
- A dog that barks at everything (kids, paper carrier, birds, other dogs, cats, squirrels, etc.) is a nuisance barker, if the barking episodes are continuous.
- A dog that barks for five minutes every Saturday morning at 6 am is not an habitual barker. Irritating but not habitual.

There is considerable effort involved in issuing a citation. Your statement is important and you may have to testify. If the problem is really bad, it's worth it. But do consider it carefully.

There can be quite a long time before the court actually hears a contested case. During the interim, it is possible that the annoyance can continue. This can be an awkward time. We encourage you to continue documenting, but a second citation is not really appropriate. "White noise," such as the whirring of a fan or air conditioner is helpful.

What if no one's home?

A dog barking due to abandonment or neglect (no food, water or shelter) is another

issue. In these situations, statements from more than one address help expedite the process of getting the dog the appropriate care.

Other avenues:

The Dispute Resolution Center is a non-profit organization supported by local government that is intended to help people resolve problems they can't work out alone. It costs nothing or very little, and can produce some pretty amazing results. The Dispute Resolution Center's number is 360-956-1155.

How to reach us:

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