



Information Series

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My Dog Barks: What Dog Owners Need to Know

Barking Complaints

Barking complaints are bad news for everyone: for the owners of the barking dog(s) because they are startled and unhappy to find an Animal Services Officer at their door; for the complainant because he has lost sleep; and for Animal Services because we have to deal with seriously frayed tempers.



Resolving barking complaints is complex. Animal Services can't offer a "silver bullet" solution to make the barking problem go away.

We hope the following information will help you understand what local ordinances say about noise caused by pet animals and how Animal Services staff can help you with your dog's barking problem.

Frequently Asked Questions

What do the local ordinances say about noise caused by pet animals?

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 happens when a "barking complaint" is filed against me?

When a neighbor is bothered by habitual or continual barking, they call Animal Services and complain. An Animal Services Officer will contact you. The Officer will let you know the specifics of the complaint and expect you to do something about the barking. This is the first step in solving the barking problem. Animal Services knows most people want to be good neighbors. In many instances, the dog owner is unaware his dog is barking.

If the barking problem is not corrected, a citation may be filed against you. A citation is based on statements made by the people who are disturbed by the barking. You will be given ample warning before a citation is issued. If you are willing to work on your dog's barking problem (and with your neighbors), a citation is usually not necessary.

Who responds to "barking dog" complaints?

Animal Services responds to barking dog complaints within the city limits of Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater. At this time, there is no one assigned to respond to barking complaints in unincorporated Thurston County.

What if my dog isn't barking?

If another dog in the area prompted the barking complaint, help the Animal Services Officer locate the dog.

Why does my dog bark?

Dogs are social animals. They can easily become bored. When dogs are bored, they bark or howl. Dogs kept on chains or in small outside kennels are more apt to bark than those kept in fenced yards or in the house. If the only human attention a dog receives is

punishment for barking, his barking behavior will continue.

I heard that my dog can bark all he wants until 10:00 pm. Is that correct?

The nuisance pet animal ordinance is not time sensitive. The ordinance refers to “habitual or continual barking, whining, howling or other noise...” It does not consider the time the noise occurs.

The neighbors’ dogs run loose and cause my dog to bark. What can I do?

No one has to tolerate loose dogs in their neighborhood. Talk to the owners of the loose dogs and tell them you are interested in keeping the neighborhood peaceful. If the dogs continue to run, you can confine them and call Animal Services. If you know where the dogs live, write down the address for the Animal Services Officer.

What is the best way to stop my dog from barking ?

The best way to stop your dog from barking is to keep your dog from being bored. Keep your dog healthy, exercised, provided with chew toys and actively involved in your family.

If I get a second dog to keep my dog company, will that help stop his barking ?

A second dog may help your dog stop barking by keeping both dogs from getting bored. However, you may wind up with two barking dogs!

I want my dog to be a watch dog. I have to let him bark, don’t I?

A good watch dog only barks at persons entering its property. Once your dog has alerted you that someone is on the property, praise him and tell him “quiet” or “that’s enough.” The best place for a watch dog is inside the house with the family that it protects. A dog that barks at every person walking by or at your neighbors is useless as a watch dog.

I’ve heard about things like high frequency tone producers and citronella collars that are supposed to stop my dog from barking. What about these devices?

These devices may have a part in a broader training regimen but rarely work by themselves. Ask a reputable trainer for information about how they work.

What about surgical debarking?

This is a drastic measure but this surgery is available from some veterinarians.

Training Tips

Barking is a means of communication for dogs. When one dog begins barking, the other members of the community join in. If you yell at your dog to stop barking, he interprets this as your “joining in” and probably will not stop barking. You need to make an interrupting sound such as a shaker can (a small can with pebbles in it) or an electronic high frequency device to get his attention. As soon as your dog is silent, tell your dog in a firm voice “That’s enough.”

If the dog stays silent, immediately praise him with “good.” Use a happy voice. Timing is extremely important – say “that’s enough” only after the dog has stopped barking. Repeat this procedure several times, as needed.

For more information on how to control barking, you can read our flier titled, “Controlling Barking,” available our website: www.jointanimalservices.org.

