



FACT SHEET

Proposed Ordinance to Prohibit the Unattended Tethering of Dogs

The proposed ordinance prohibits any form of unattended tethering of dogs. Supervised, temporary tethering is permitted if an owner or competent custodian remains in the immediate physical presence and line of sight of their dog.

Rationale: The most effective tethering ordinance and easiest to enforce is a complete ban on unattended tethering, including the use of trolleys. This clear distinction allows law enforcement to determine violations more readily and objectively. Time-based tethering ordinances struggle with enforceability. Most animal control officers do not have the capacity to monitor a dog for extended periods to verify that the owner has complied with time constraints.

Why Cities and Counties Need This Ordinance

Animal Welfare Concerns

Experts have long agreed that continuous unattended tethering, whether single-point or two-point (cable runner), is inhumane and causes immense physical and emotional suffering in dogs.

- A tether significantly restricts a dog's movement and can also become tangled around objects, potentially causing injury or strangulation.
- With tethering, dogs often are deprived of social interactions with other dogs and humans, sit in their own waste, are exposed to weather extremes, and have limited access to food, water, and shelter.
- Unsupervised, tethered dogs can become victims of attacks by coyotes, roaming dogs, or people.
- Criminals engaged in dogfighting often leave dogs outdoors on chains; therefore, bans on unattended tethering help expose this cruel and illegal activity to law enforcement.
- Unaltered, tethered female dogs are more likely to become pregnant and contribute to the excessive number of unwanted pets overwhelming our shelters in Georgia.

Public Safety Concerns

Unattended tethering poses a significant safety risk to communities. A tether is a form of restraint but does not provide a complete barrier like a fence or other form of enclosure for a dog. Therefore, people and animals can intentionally or unintentionally come into contact with a tethered dog. Tethering contributes to fear, stress, and resource guarding with a dog, thus potentially triggering a “fight or flight” response that may result in a bite (since flight is taken away). Animal behaviorists, veterinarians, and animal welfare advocates acknowledge that continuously tethered dogs are often frustrated, unsocialized, and have an increased potential to bite or attack people.

A recent study in the Journal of Injury Epidemiology¹ found that dog bite injuries were more prevalent in poorer neighborhoods. Public policy should reduce the risk for all residents, especially for children who are subject to more severe injuries from unattended dogs. Most dog bites are preventable through responsible pet ownership and supervision.

In a well-known veterinary study, 256 fatal dog bite attacks were examined over a 10-year period to identify co-contributing factors.³ The most striking finding was the lack of supervision of the dog in nearly all fatalities. Note that most of the following factors were preventable and under direct control of dog owners. Breed was not a factor in these fatalities.

- **87%** of the dogs were unsupervised at the time of the fatal attack, meaning there was no able-bodied person present with the dog who could have intervened. This factor is important as children under the age of 5 made up almost half of the victims (45%), showing that this group is especially vulnerable around unsupervised dogs.
- **83%** of the dogs were unaltered at the time of the attack (not spayed or neutered).
- **76%** of the dogs were kept as “resident” dogs on the property, rather than as family pets, meaning the dogs were kept isolated and denied socialization with people and other dogs. Family pets, on the other hand, typically receive nurturing, training, and socialization. Rarely is a family pet involved in fatal attacks.
- **74%** of the victims had no relationship to the dog.
- **74%** of the fatalities occurred on the owner’s property.
- **29%** of the dogs were on a chain at the time of the attack.
- **21%** of the dogs were subjected to neglect or abuse by the owner

Attended tethering by a competent person will reduce the likelihood of a dog bite. Around 4.5 million dog bites occur in the U.S. each year with close to a million needing medical attention. Georgia ranks 10th out of 50 states in dog bite liability claims. Given the prevalence of owner negligence in lethal and non-lethal attacks, lawmakers should enact policies that support responsible pet ownership which includes a ban on unattended tethering. Dogs should also be given opportunities to socialize with people and other dogs to develop healthy behaviors.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises against keeping a dog tied up outside because of the greater likelihood of dog bites.⁴ Instead, the CDC recommends that dogs be confined behind a fence to protect them from wild animals and reduce the risk of interacting with strangers.

Local Precedents in Georgia

Examples of counties in Georgia that have passed ordinances prohibiting the unattended tethering of dogs with favorable results include: Athens-Clarke, Barrow, Cherokee, Cobb, Floyd, Forsyth, Gwinnett, Hall, Newton, Oconee, and Walton.

References

¹ The changing epidemiology of dog bite injuries in the United States (2020): <https://injejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-020-00281-y>

³ [J Am Vet Med Assoc.](#) 2013 Dec 15;243(12):1726-36. doi: 10.2460/javma.243.12.1726. [Patronek GJ¹](#), [Sacks JJ](#), [Delise KM](#), [Cleary DV](#), [Marder AR](#). Co-occurrence of potentially preventable factors in 256 dog bite-related fatalities in the United States (2000-2009).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control (March 8, 2022): <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/dogs.html>