



## Fear of Dogs and Courthouse Dogs

A certain percentage of people are afraid of all dogs – big or little, friendly or aggressive, active or quiet. Experienced dog handlers are sure to encounter individuals who are afraid of the well-mannered dog at the end of the leash. Some fear of dogs may arise because of confusion in a person's mind between a "police dog" and a friendly Facility Dog. What can be done to minimize the problem for all concerned?

The worst reaction will occur if the encounter with the dog is sudden and unexpected. To avoid this, there are a few simple steps which can be taken by the handler and the program supervisor.

The first line of defense against an unexpected encounter is a clear picture of the dog and its handler posted in a prominent area at the entrance to the building or to the specific area where the dog works. In this way, everyone has at least had some chance to be forewarned that there is a dog present in the facility. If you have reprints of articles about the dogs, or a brochure from the sponsoring organization, leave these out for people to read and find out more about the canine program.

Facility Dogs should always wear a vest or other indication of their official status, and should always be on lead.

The most important element in avoiding problems for people who are afraid of dogs is for the handler to be acutely aware of her/his surroundings at all times. Speak to everyone you encounter who seems interested in the dog; if a person seems concerned, stop some distance away and introduce yourself and the dog. When you are in a large open area, respect the fact that some people may have moved away and may prefer to watch you and the dog from across the room rather than approach. When entering a new room or area, keep your dog on a very short lead until you are sure that everyone present is comfortable.

A handler should remember that not everyone who backs away from a dog is necessarily afraid. There may be allergy problems or religious prohibitions against close contact with dogs; these people may enjoy watching the dog perform tricks or play with other people, although they will watch from a little distance.